

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**USING AFFECT THEORY FOR STUDYING  
LITERATURE: SYLVIA PLATH'S *THE BELL JAR*  
MA thesis**

**SVEN BLEHNER  
SUPERVISOR: PROF. RAILI MARLING**

**TARTU  
[2019]**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how affect theory can be used for analysing literature on the example of Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*. The purpose of the thesis is to create a toolkit of affective themes and employ it on analysing *The Bell Jar* in order to show that affect theory might be a useful tool for analysing fiction as it potentially furthers our understanding of real-life affective problems. The toolkit is created by synthesising various scholarly accounts on affect theory. A secondary purpose of the thesis is to give an analytical overview of how affect has been theorised in the humanities and synthesise a definition of affect suitable for analysing literature.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two core chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides background information that frames the thesis. It also identifies the research gap and states the aims and research questions of the thesis.

The first core chapter comprises two parts. The first part is dedicated to an analytical overview of the term 'affect' and defines affect for the purpose of the thesis. The second half of the first core chapter builds a toolkit of affective themes by synthesising the works of such affect scholars as Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Kathleen Stewart. The toolkit is built with the focus on *The Bell Jar* and it consists of four main themes: Gender Roles, Social Roles, The We and the Others, and The Ordinary.

The second core chapter applies the toolkit for analysing *The Bell Jar*. Affective themes are found in the novel through attentive reading, paying particular attention to textual and contextual markers that might indicate affective situations. These situations or themes are analysed by drawing on the toolkit as well as considering the social reality of the 1950s USA.

The conclusion presents the summary and findings of the thesis. It further points out the value of the thesis and discusses further possible research relevant to the topic.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>On Affect .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Historical Development of the Concept of Affect .....	10
Affect: Contemporary theory .....	12
<b>Affective Themes Toolkit .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Gender Roles .....	28
Social Roles .....	32
The We and the Others .....	35
The Ordinary .....	39
<b>Representations of Affects and Affective Themes in Sylvia Plath's Novel <i>The Bell Jar</i></b>	
<b>.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Resümee .....</b>	<b>83</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Brian Massumi (1995: 100) argues that we need to turn from the idea in cultural theory that “everything, including nature, is constructed in discourse”, for language is not always the sole or the best means for representing and making sense of experiences because the nonhuman is irreducibly different from the human in and through its connection with the human (*ibid.*). Thus, he calls for an affective turn.

Affect theory has since been widely explored by authors in the social sciences and humanities with the aim to understand human experience, including social and bodily, in a world in which, according to Patricia Ticineto Clough (2007: 1), “ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism” have become symptomatic events that critical theory is challenged to analyse. Even though affect theory is interested in a wide variety of encounters between humans and between humans and matter, very little has been written about using affect theory for a practical analysis of literature. Indeed, various texts, including films, poems, and novels, are often used to illustrate the theory, whereas an analysis of an entire text with the help of affect theory is rare. It is a matter of focus.

Literature matters. With literature, we cannot circumvent language, for in a text, which does not exist outside culture, affect and language are knit together. Timothy O’Leary (2005: 554-556), drawing on Michel Foucault and John Dewey, argues that literature as an art form plays a twofold role:

In the public, shared world it unifies by breaking down conventional distinctions that usually prevent us from seeing and expressing the common elements of the world. While at the level of the individual it unifies by building up the complexity and richness of the individual personality. On the one hand, it changes the way we see and experience the world by removing barriers and differences; on the other hand, it changes our self by composing differences. (O’Leary 2005: 554)

Thus, literature has the power to change the world. Admittedly, the effect any one work of literature has is usually small, even imperceptible. However, as O’Leary (2005: 555-556) claims, since literature has an effect on our past, present, and future, its effect is more

impressive than the ability to stop a train in its tracks. This power comes from art's ability to provide a unified, whole experience whose intensity enables the viewer or reader to "remake his past experiences so that they can enter integrally into a new pattern" (O'Leary 2005: 546, 552-553). In short, "engaging with a work of art not only has an effect on our future experiences"; "it also changes our past experiences and forces us to recast them in a new pattern" (O'Leary 2005: 553).

Further, literature offers the reader knowledge of other cultures and social groups as well as vicarious experiences. This ties in with the often repeated idea that reading helps to develop empathy (see, e.g., Suzanne Keen (2006: 209, 2007: VII)), for vicariously experiencing characters' emotions from various narrative worlds offers the reader insight into other possible ways of being, thinking, understanding, which in turn, as an intense experience, may change the reader. Vicarious experiences are also valuable in that they give the readers guilty pleasures, let them indulge in thoughts and activities that are otherwise taboo (Fineman 1980: 89).

Literature's relevance also comes from its not existing in isolation. Robert A. Hall (1961: 121) states that it derives certain of its basic characteristics from language and has an intimate relationship to life. Thus, according to Hall (1961: 121, 126), literature involves communication via the medium of language and offers insight into a person's experiences in relation to other individuals and experiences of humans as being humans and offers aesthetic pleasure.

In addition to literature's value as art, it is also a representation of (possible) reality. This does not mean that fiction is necessarily mimetic of the time and place it was written in, as one would deduce from Erich Auerbach's (2013) monumental work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (first published in 1946). However, no work of art can wholly escape the influence of its time and thus, depending on the work of fiction,

the reader might glimpse the zeitgeist, values, discourses, and so forth of the time the work was written in and/or about. Further, it may be argued, in parallel to Juri Lotman's (2011: 260) argument that "the perception of a work of art requires a certain – artistic – kind of behaviour that has several characteristics in common with playful behaviour" and that the most important characteristic of artistic behaviour is that the person practicing it experiences all the emotions that an analogous real-world situation would evoke while being clearly aware that there is no need to perform the actions related to the situation, that literature creates a reality that the reader may experience. In addition, Lotman (2011: 261) explains that art works "towards the important goal of getting a grasp of the world" by "exchanging the immensely complicated rules of the reality for a simpler system". In other words, literature helps us to better understand the world by representing the world in a 'simpler' way. Indeed, Liesbeth Korthals Altes (2014: 24) argues that a literary text verbally displays the state of affairs and invites the addressee to contemplate, evaluate, and respond to it; it invites an imaginative and affective involvement with it.

This leads us to the question, why use affect theory for studying literature? As is evident from the discussion why literature matters, engaging with literature has an affective component, for it creates intensity and reconfiguration. Further, as literature offers vicarious experiences, it thus also enables us to experience vicarious affects. Therefore, it is important to understand how affects are represented in a work of fiction, for this furthers our understanding how affect works, what it does in our real-world encounters with people, various objects and non-literary texts as well as how it makes literature compelling.

However, there are various ways of studying literature in terms of affect theory. For example, one can focus on the reader's affect, or how the reader is affected by the text. This kind of analysis requires using various methods for measuring affective responses as well as the reader's own account of the experienced affects. One can also examine the affects of the

story world, or study the linguistic and other textual markers of affect: how affect is expressed in the text. Furthermore, affect theory may be used for a socio-critical analysis of a literary text. The last three modes of research are closely connected in that studying the affects experienced in the story world also requires scrutinizing textual markers of affect, and socio-critical analysis requires paying attention to both textual markers and affects of the narrative world. In this thesis, my primary focus is on socio-critical analysis of affect in Sylvia Plath's (2013) only novel, *The Bell Jar* (first published in 1963 under the pen name Victoria Lucas (Wagner-Martin 2003: 146)).

Even though there are numerous studies on *The Bell Jar*, most of them concentrate feminist issues and/or on the novel's ties with Plath's biography (see, e.g., Susan J. Behrens (2013), Sarah Ives (2013), Andru Lugo (2010), Georgiana Banita (2007), and E. Miller Budick (1987)). Indeed, the novel is considered a semi-autobiographical work that offers insight into the author's personal life and experiences. Even though following this line by studying how affects in *The Bell Jar* and Plath's own life are connected may be fruitful, it is not the concern of this thesis. However, to the best of my knowledge, at the time of writing this thesis, there is no research on *The Bell Jar* that concentrates on affect theory and the entire text of the novel.

One reason for choosing this novel to study lies in the simple (and perhaps affective) fact that I love it, and it has had a considerable impact on my own life. More importantly, *The Bell Jar* has easily noticeable affective themes both in terms of text and content. Further, it is set in the USA of the 1950s (mainly 1953-1954), which was a stereotypical era in that on the surface, everything seemed to be alright in terms of affects. The society had a homogenous dream. Thus, it is curious that a novel such as *The Bell Jar*, rich in affective problems, was published at the beginning of the 1960s.

In order to give a background to *The Bell Jar*, I will point out, leaning on Stephanie Coontz (2000: 23-41), some of the aspects of the social reality of the 1950s in USA. Coontz (2000: 23) explains that the modern nostalgic ideal of the traditional family was invented in the 1950s. Indeed, divorce rate was low, birth rate was high, and less than ten percent of Americans believed that an unmarried person could be happy. Further, many were becoming more prosperous, moved to the suburbs and spent a large portion of their oncome on household goods. One of the reasons for the rise of the nuclear family were the oppressive extended family ties people were forced into during the Great Depression and the Second World War. Thus, the 'normal' families moved to the suburbs where women became stay-at-home mothers whose identity was rooted in familial and parental roles and who saw doing all the housework as the expression of their femininity and individuality.

However, not all Americans did that well – twenty-five percent were poor and depended on housing programmes and food stamps (Coontz 2000: 29). Neither did all women retreat to housewifery freely – they were forced to give up the skilled and now high-paying jobs they had during the war (Coontz 2000: 29, see also Ruth Milkman (2016: 79-118). Further, women who had trouble adjusting to the normative role of mother and housewife and did not follow the dictates of their husbands were labelled neurotic, perverted, and schizophrenic, and often institutionalised and even given shock treatments. It is thus not surprising that many families showing outward signs of happiness, which came at a great cost for women, were actually miserable.

The 1950s also saw the rise of the youth culture (Coontz 2000: 37-38), as companies saw great profit marketing directly to them. This is also the time when advertising and consumerism became saturated with sex. This, in turn, led to a complex code of sexual conduct, which put all the responsibility of sexual containment on women; men no longer bore responsibility for saving themselves for marriage (Coontz 2000: 40).



Considering this brief account on Coontz's (2000: 23-41) work as well as the fact that, according to Wagner-Martin (2003: 42) women's disdain for their own health as they starved themselves to be thin and model-like was part of the feminine self-sacrificing ethos, it is no wonder that *The Bell Jar*'s protagonist, Esther Greenwood, had a troubled life filled with affects connected to the normative ideals of her time.

In order to write about affective themes, the first chapter of this thesis first gives an overview how various scholars have theorized the concept of affect as well as defines the term for the purpose of this thesis. The second part of the first chapter outlines several affective themes that are divided into loose groups, and forms a toolkit that can be used for analysing a literary text.

The second chapter of this thesis uses the toolkit to analyse Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*. However, the analysis does not follow the toolkit's order of affective themes; rather, it focuses on specific themes and problems present in the novel and applies corresponding sections of toolkit.

## ON AFFECT

### Historical Development of the Concept of Affect

The term ‘affect’ has a somewhat complex history. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word has been used in English since the late fourteenth century to denote mind-related concepts such as emotion, mood, intention, natural tendency, and desire. However, the term ‘affect’ also had another dimension of meaning already in the sixteenth century and was thus used to denote an abnormal state of the body, a disease.

According to Poynton and Lee (2011: 635), in western epistemology, the term ‘affect’ originates in Christian theology in which it was understood in relation to emotion and passion, as indicated in the first definition. However, as the western world became increasingly secular, the term spread from there to philosophy and, in the nineteenth century, to the discipline of psychology in which it has been “equated with personal, and interiorly experienced, feeling” (Poynton and Lee 2011: 635-636).

In philosophy, one of the early theorizers of affect was the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) in whose view, as summarized by Brian Ott (2017: 1-2), affect entailed two separate but connected dimensions – *affectus* and *affectio* –, and a body could be affected in various ways that would increase or decrease its power to act. Gregory J. Seigworth (2005: 162) explains that for Spinoza, *affectio* denoted “the state of a body as it affects or is affected by another body” and *affectus* “a body's continuous, intensive variation (as increase-diminution) in its capacity for acting”. According to Ott (2017: 2-8) the concept of *affectio* is precisely what underpins many contemporary psychological and neurological understandings of affect as an elemental state and led to research trying to pin down primary affects, or basic emotions. It should be noted here that in the fields of psychology and neuroscience the word ‘affect’ was and is often used interchangeably with ‘emotion’,

particularly in the context of ‘basic’ or ‘primary’ affects/emotions. For example, Silvan Tomkins (2009: 163-168) identifies nine innate affects, such as excitement, surprise, and shame, and defines affect as “the primary innate biological motivating mechanism, more urgent than drive deprivation and pleasure, and more urgent even than physical pain”. However, Andrew Ortony and Terence J. Turner (1990: 315-316) argue that different theorists (including Tomkins) identify more or less similar lists of basic emotions.

However, more importantly for contemporary affect theory, Spinoza’s ideas were developed by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995). Even though his work on affect mainly draws on the Spinozan concept of *affectus*, Seigworth (2005: 166-167) argues that Deleuze used the concept *affectio* in the sense of “actualization as the ‘state of a thing’, that is, affect turned ‘effect’”; *affectus* in the sense of “affect as ‘becoming’, a continual inclining or declining slope or greater or lesser degrees of intensity or potentiality”; and *affect* in the sense of “pure immanence at its most concrete abstraction from all becomings and states of things”, which means that the autonomy of affect lies outside distinctions of interiority or exteriority.

It is evident from the above discussion on affect in the field of psychology as well as in philosophy and cultural studies that affect (*affectus*) is corporeal or embodied in its nature. Further, as described by Poynton and Lee (2011: 636-637), contemporary philosophical views of affect are much concerned with identities and flows, or in other words, affect’s ability to travel from one body to another and push it toward action or inaction. Poynton and Lee (2011: 636-637) further argue that in this regard, affect theorists fall into two broad categories: those (e.g., Brian Massumi) who argue that affect is a prepersonal, prelinguistic intensity that comes before action and thus forms, rather than carries out, desire; and those (e.g. Lawrence Grossberg) who argue that affect is a more relational intensity that is oriented from the subject outwards to the world and that circulates between objects.

## **Affect: Contemporary Theory**

In view of this significant disagreement about the meanings of affect, it is productive to take a closer look on how various scholars (above all Brian Massumi, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Kathleen Stewart, Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth) explain and define affect in terms of what and where it is located and what it does.

Brian Massumi goes to great lengths in explaining the term following Baruch Spinoza as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari whose *A Thousand Plateaus* (in Massumi's translation) was published in English in 1987. Indeed, Massumi often emphasizes the core of Spinoza's definition of affect as the power "to affect and be affected", which he glosses as "to be open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity" (Massumi 2015: IX, 48). This means that encounters have an affective component, as they begin with an event – defined by Alan Bourassa (2002: 66), following Deleuze, as an effect of the mingling and colliding of bodies and materials as opposed to the mingling and colliding itself – which in turn means there is a relation, reciprocation, and change, transition. In other words, in an encounter we both affect and are affected because there is a change (however slight) in our relation to our environment and the encountered. Moreover, this affect-induced change or transition, in turn, opens us up to be affected in a slightly different way than before, which means that a body's ability to affect and be affected is not fixed and that a body's state of capacitation is diminished or augmented (Massumi 2015: 4, 48). In the transition between levels of capacitation, the distinction between the two levels is felt, which means there is a separation-connection between the body and what we normally call the self; this in-betweenness is where affect lies (Massumi 2015: 48; Massumi 2011: 113).

It follows that affect is processual or 'transversal', as it cuts across such concepts as subjective and objective in terms of the feeling process (Massumi 2015: X). In other words,

affect strikes instantly both the body and the mind. As it strikes, its expressions, such as anger or laughter, may create interruptions in the situation. Massumi (2015: 8-9) explains that what gets interrupted is the normalised interrelations and interactions and their functions that are being fulfilled. In other words, these interruptions are of something that does not fit into the society's or a person's normalized expectations of how things ought to be or function. These kinds of powerful affective expressions create a pause that, as Massumi puts it (2015: 9) "forces the situation to rearray itself around that irruption, and to deal with the intensity in one way or another", so that there is a reconfiguration.

Further, Massumi (2015: 3) insists that affect is not a personal feeling, an emotion in the everyday sense. For him affect is of the body whereas emotion is of the mind. However, the mind and the body are not as completely separate as was thought by Rene Descartes, but rather the two sides of the same coin, as there is a connection between affect and emotion. Massumi (2015: 4) argues that affect is about intensity as it involves a kind of doubling in that the experience of a change is redoubled by an experience of the experience that "gives the body's movements a kind of depth that stays with it across all its transitions – accumulating in memory, in habit, in reflex, in desire, in tendency", whereas emotion is "the way the depth of that ongoing experience registers personally at a given moment." In other words, an emotion follows affect and is a limited expression of affect because a single emotional state cannot contain the whole of our experiencing of experiencing, for it draws on only a small selection of potentially available memories and only activates a limited array of reflexes, tendencies, and so forth (Massumi 2015: 5, Massumi 2005: 37-38). Following this logic, affect as a whole may be defined as "the virtual co-presence of potentials" or a body's "capacity to come to do" (Massumi 2015: 5, 7).

The concept of potential leads us to another way affect has to do with intensity. Massumi (2015: 5-6) argues that as there is a great number of potential ways of affecting

and being affected. Affect propels us forward (not necessarily in the sense of positive progress) by creating a sense of freedom, a sense of a number of possibilities we can choose from, even if it is but the same potential whose only existence is virtual. Massumi (2015: 6) further opines that the greater the number of potentials we feel we have, the more they intensify our lives and the more we are connected to others and other situations, which creates a greater sense of belonging with other people and other places.

It may be deduced from this discussion on affect's intensity and immediacy that affect somehow skips the thought process or at least does not enter conscious thought before taking place. Indeed, Massumi (2015: 9-10) argues that affect involves bodily thinking that is vaguely conscious in the sense of not being a fully formed thought but rather "a movement of thought, or a thinking movement". This kind of thought that is still expressed in bodily feeling, in its sensation of going into action, before conscious reflection or use of guarded language, may be thought of as 'abduction' or 'capture' (Massumi 2015: 9-10) in that the affective situation sort of arrests us, draws us in. Coming back to the example of anger, Massumi (2015: 9) explains that when responding to an outburst of anger, there is instantaneous judgement that brings the entire body into the situation, but there is no judgment in the sense of explicitly thinking through all the possibilities, for there simply is no time for that.

The uncertainty of the instantaneous judgement that may go one way or another is precisely what produces an affective change in the situation (Massumi 2015: 11). Further, how the situation plays out matters because it affects the further actions of the people: affective affairs have consequences.

As affect changes a body's capacity to act, be it diminishing, enabling, or arresting, it also has a political dimension in the sense of power relations. Massumi (2015: IX) explains that affect is proto-political in that it "concerns the first stirrings of the political, flush with

the felt intensities of life”. The political dimension is also evident in the Spinozan base definition of affect: the power to affect and be affected (Massumi, 2015: IX). It may be deduced from this relational (see Massumi 2011: 113) definition of affect that on the one hand, having the power to affect is in itself political, and on the other hand, the outcomes of affective situations play a role in determining power relations or positions of power.

Writing about affect and language, Alan Bourassa (2002: 64) argues that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, percepts’ affects’ validity lies in themselves, it could be said to exist in the absence of humans as they themselves are compounds of percepts (objects of perception) and affects. Bourassa (2002: 65) goes on to explain that affect is non-human in the sense that “human language has nothing to communicate of the non-human world without that non-human world communicating itself to him”. As I understand it, the term ‘human’ is not used here in its biological sense as species but rather what makes *Homo sapiens* human. In Bourassa’s (2002: 65) words, “affect allows us to think of the human in terms of what surpasses it, undermines it, fragments it, but also in terms of what simultaneously supports its, energizes it and holds it together.”

Catherine Dale (2002: 91) argues that autonomous affect is distinct from the passions and actions of the body and it is found at a point of change when thought realizes itself in the body. Dale (2002: 91) further defines affect as “the implied relation between intensities of pure difference as it is experienced by the senses”. Although for her affect is from a level not yet human, it is not nothing, as it still produces signs. This account falls in line with Brian Massumi’s and Alan Bourassa’s in that they too emphasise that affect brings about change, operates on the pre-personal level, and is first experienced in the body and then translated into signs or emotions that are comprehended on the level of the human.

Discussing perception and virtual reality, Andrew Murphie (2002: 196) claims that affect is not unidirectional as it is an “exchange of deterritorialized quanta – an exchange

that changes the entire continuum of vibrating matter that participates in this exchange”. Thus, when we perceive, there is an interaction that is made up of a series of interactions between subject and object that registers, and each affect is “regarded as its own processual micro-ecosystem” (Murphie, 2002: 197). Consequently, as Murphie (*ibid.*) explains, perception has two levels – unconscious and conscious. The first is made up of minute perceptions, that is, affects on a miniature and immediate level. Conscious perception perceives the difference that describes and produces affect. In Murphie’s view then, affect operates on two levels: miniature affects on the immediate and unconscious level that bring about the perceivable difference and thus affect that enters consciousness. For example, as Murphie (2002: 197) explains, our senses survey thousands of details, but we see a ‘person’; and that person is the product of the difference that operates through miniature details. Thus, Murphie and Massumi agree that affect is relational, pre-personal, and brings about change, but Murphie also distinguishes between two types of affect (at least in terms of perception).

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger’s (2002: 229) account of affect is also similar to Massumi’s, as she describes how affective phenomena like admiration, amazement, and anxiety are “shared, exchanged, and diffracted on the unconscious partial dimension.” In other words, in her view, affect operates on an unconscious level, and thus it may be argued, is pre-personal.

It is clear from the above brief summary that affect takes many forms, which is something Massumi (2015: 47) himself confirms by claiming: “To get anywhere with the concept, you have to retain the manyness of its forms. It’s not something that can be reduced to one thing”. I will thus list the main aspects or properties of affect that I have discussed this far, even if such an account is necessarily incomplete in the view of affect’s manyness. Affect is the power to affect and be affected. Affect is about intensity. Affect is relational and interactional, which means that encounters are affective. Affect induces irruptions and



transitions and thus enhancing, diminishing, or arresting a body's capacity to act, and also causing a body to realign itself to deal with the irruption. Affect is (proto-)political: it alters power relations. Affect is transversal, it cuts across concepts like subjective and objective. Affect is not emotion but is not completely separate from it either; emotion is an expression of affect. Affect may be viewed as a body's virtual co-presence of potentials to act. Affect is pre-personal, pre-linguistic, and it precedes consciousness.

Eugenie Brinkema (2014: 24) agrees with Deleuze (and Massumi) that affects "are not feelings, emotions, or moods but autonomous potentialities, pure 'possibles' that are linked to a complex series of highly specific terms, such as 'sensation', 'becoming', 'force', 'lines of flight' and 'deterritorialization'", and that affect is not linked to the individuated subject. However, while Deleuze does away with the subject, he keeps a firm grasp on the role of the body in thinking about affectivity, Brinkema loses the body for affect as well and defines affect "as a self-folding exteriority that manifests in, as, and with textual form" (Brinkema, 2014: 24-25). Brinkema (2014: 38, 97) argues that the intentional intensity of texts – and I mean the term in a rather broad sense including for example literature and films – is made available through the activity of reading and not interpretation, implying that form should be paired with affect. Brinkema's (2014: 97, 235, 271) view seems to fall in line with Massumi's in that affect involves transition, it is something that is nothing, and that affects are distinct from emotions as the latter necessarily have a subject attached to them and are thus intensities owned and recognized.

As discussed earlier, affects have to do with events, situations, encounters. For Berlant (2011: 5), a situation is a normal or ordinary state of things in which something relevant may be unfolding, creating an "animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness", producing a sense of "the emergence of something in the present that may become an event". This understanding of 'event' and 'situation' is similar to

Massumi's, except that for him, as opposed to Berlant, 'event' governs the 'situation'. However, the animated suspension, the hiatus is where affect is born, for as Berlant (2011: 5-6, 53) explains, it provides a way of affectively thinking of some conventions with which we develop a historical sense of the present.

Berlant (2011: 13-15, 79) argues that affect has to do with relationality because affective atmospheres are shared and bodies continuously judge their environment, and because attachments and the desire to maintain them are relational. However, for Berlant "the experience of affect and emotion that attaches to those relations is as extremely varied as the contexts of life in which they emerge" (Berlant 2011: 13).

Berlant (2011: 158-159) also makes an important distinction between the structure of an affect and what we call that affect when it is encountered. In other words, what an affect feels and looks like are different things, for what one feels like may not be how one's countenance is recognized – "all babies smile, but it might be gas" (Berlant 2011: 158). After all, socially recognized responses change and vary across cultures and time, and thus for example what is recognized as a shame response today may look like anger in ten years.

Berlant (2011: 52) connects affect and intuition – defined as "the work of history translated through personal memory" – in that "affect takes shape in forms whose job it is to make reliable sense of life" through intuition. It follows that memory can work affectively in shaping and making sense of the (historical) present. Further, intuition can be trained, and its training is the "the story of individual and collective biography", which means that it helps to codify affect into normative emotion and "enables us to formulate, without closing down, the investments and incoherence of political subjectivity and subjectification in relation to the world's disheveled but predictable dynamics" (Berlant 2011: 53).

Like for Massumi and others, affect is visceral or bodily for Berlant as well. However, she argues that visceral responses are connected to intuition, and indeed, we develop sort of intuitive intelligence (Berlant 2011: 16, 53).

Kathleen Stewart's take on affect is in many ways similar to that of Berlant. Indeed, in her book *Ordinary Affects*, she (2007: 7) writes: "Lauren Berlant's mode of thinking and writing on the affects of the present moment serves here as a direct inspiration and source of insight." I will concentrate on Stewart's concept of 'ordinary affect'.

For Stewart (2007: 1-2) ordinary affects are things that happen; they are the "capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences". These affects happen in impulses, sensations, daydreams, expectations, encounters, attachments, and in public and social worlds, for example. Stewart (2007: 2-4, 9) further elaborates that they are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation and can be experienced in many ways, such as shock, pleasure, pause. Whatever the experience, they have an impact, cause an interruption that forces a reconfiguration. Towards the end of the book, she gives a more concise definition of the term 'ordinary affect:'

Ordinary affect is a surging, a rubbing, a connection of some kind that has an impact. It's transpersonal or prepersonal—not about one person's feelings becoming another's but about bodies literally affecting one another and generating intensities: human bodies, discursive bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of water. (Stewart 2007: 128)

This succinct elucidation echoes several of the important aspects of affect seen in the works of scholars like Massumi and Berlant and that have been shortly explored here as well.

Considering the above definition, it logically follows that in Stewart's view, affect and politics are closely connected. Indeed, Stewart (2007: 15-16) explains that the politics of ordinary affect is the politics of a surge, and how and in whose hands it plays out depends on what happens. An example of an ordinary affective political struggle is the American

dream, for as Stewart (2007: 93-94) explains, there are only winners and losers, there are veiled threats, dead ends, but also hope and potential.

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010: 1) start their account of affect by explaining that there is no pure or originary state of affect, as it “arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon”, which directly echoes the Spinozan definition of affect. Gregg and Seigworth continue to explain:

Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces-visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion - that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations. (2010: 1)

Gregg and Seigworth (2010: 2) further explain that affect can be understood as synonymous with force or force of encounter, even if affect is always not necessarily particularly forceful. In fact, affect often transpires within and across subtle movement of intensities, unnoticed molecular events. It is “born in in-between-ness and resides in accumulative beside-ness,” which means that affect can be understood as a gradient of bodily capacity, an incrementalism of ever-modulating force relations (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 2). As affect exists in the in-between-ness, it is both intimate and impersonal, it traverses and accumulates both relatedness and interruptions and, therefore, travels between bodies and extends to and out of the interstices of the organic and inorganic (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 2).

This account is similar Massumi's and Brinkema's understanding of affect delineated above. Seigworth (2005: 161) also emphasizes that affect “cannot be converted into or delimited by the discursive, by images or representations, by consciousness or thought”, and that affect is autonomous from both the intellect as well as affectional-corporeal tracings.

However, Seigworth's and Gregg's view (as well as Massumi's) of affect is rather broad, since it seems impossible to pin down what exactly affect is or does or what affect theory should study and with which methodology. It may even be argued that in a sense, affect is ineffable. On the other hand, such a wide-ranging conglomerate of a definition may cause the term 'affect' to become an empty signifier, which according to Ernesto Laclau (1996: 36-46) loses specificity through proliferation of different meanings attributed to it.

Sara Ahmed's understanding of affect, however, contrasts with Brian Massumi's work in that they disagree on some key points. In Ahmed's (2010: 230) view, affect is sticky in that it sustains the connection between ideas, values and objects, whereas Massumi believes affect to be autonomous and distinct from emotions. Ahmed (2010: 230) explains that the distinction between affect and emotion – affect as unqualified intensity that is beyond narrative, and emotion as qualified intensity, which is subjective, qualifies experience, and thus defined as personal – under-describes emotions, for they involve “forms of intensity, bodily orientation, and direction that are not simply about “subjective content” or qualification of intensity”.

Ahmed (2010: 230-231) also argues that “the intensities that Massumi describes as affect are “directed” as well as “qualified” or even “congealed”: this directedness is not simply about subjects and interior feeling states but about how things cohere in *a certain way*.” Further, even though an affective response can be separated from emotion (the bodily sensations from feelings), they are actually adjoined, “they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere”. Even more so, before we are affected (in the Massumian sense), we are already inclined to be affected in some ways more than others, which means that some objects, places already carry affective value for us (Ahmed 2010: 231). It follows that in Ahmed's view, affect is not autonomous.

Thus, it seems that for Ahmed, the term ‘affect’ also involves intense emotions or that affect and emotion form a whole. She uses terms like feeling, emotion, and affect somewhat interchangeably and writes about affective qualities of emotions. Ahmed (2010: 13-14, 27) explains that feelings do not simply reside in subjects and then move outward toward objects (as would be the case if we take Massumi’s definition of emotion), but they are the means by which objects create impressions in a shared space. The notion of shared space is important here because of the sticky nature of affect – some objects accumulate affective value and thus influence or orient us. Ahmed (2010: 21-24) explains that to be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. In other words, the objects (a physical object, a body, a living entity, a concept, etc.) that affect us hold a promise, possess an intensity that draws or repels us according to how we evaluate them. This connects to Massumi’s account on how affect changes a body’s capacity to act and how affect is relational.

In addition to being sticky, drawing on Silvan Tomkins (1995: 57), affect is often also described as contagious, jumping from one body to another whilst remaining intact. Ahmed (2010: 39) believes that even though thinking of affect as contagious is useful for showing how we are affected by things around us, the idea of affect contagion tends to underestimate how contingent affects are. In other words, even though we are affected by others, we can be affected differently by what gets passed around.

Another important aspect of affect Ahmed (2010: 24-28) discusses is doubling: an experience (e.g., pain) involves a particular orientation (e.g., fearful) toward that object, just as the experience of that orientation (fear) registers the experience (what is painful). Further, an affect can be anticipated without having a personal experience of the object, for objects may acquire the value of proximities (a promise) through a shared communal space. We can even anticipate an affect without being retrospective insofar as objects might acquire the

value of proximities that are not derived from our own experience. This resonates with Massumi's idea of affect as intensity because it involves a kind of doubling.

This bond between the object and the affect can, however, be loosened if the bond is recognised, for the object is not simply a cause of feeling but is also retrospectively understood as the cause of the feeling (Ahmed 2010: 27-28). Interestingly, in a scenario where an object accumulates affective value from our own conscious experience and develops into one where the object performs affectively without intervention from our consciousness ('pre-personal'), the conscious experience precedes later affect (even if that experience stems from a visceral affect). Ahmed (2014: 40) argues that even seemingly direct responses actually evoke past histories through bodily memories, without evoking consciousness, and are thus not truly immediate. She departs from separating affect or sensation from emotion, even if "‘having’ an emotion is distinct from sensations and impressions which may burn the skin before any conscious moment of recognition" (ibid.).

The above necessarily incomplete and eclectic account of various scholars' views on affect shows that it is an elusive concept and that the different understandings of affect are sometimes contradictory. Ruth Leys's (2011: 437) criticises the view of affects as "independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology—that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs—because they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning". In other words, viewing affect as utterly bodily and autonomic is problematic.

Leys (2011: 438-440) starts by pointing out that Tomkins's idea – taken up by several affect scholars – that discrete emotions or affect programmes exist subcortically in the brain and are characterised by distinct, universal facial expressions is flawed, incoherent, lacks adequate empirical evidence, and thus interpretations resulting from that evidence are unsupportable. Leys (2011: 439-440) further claims on the basis on research done by

scholars such as Alan Fridlund, James A. Russell, and Lisa Feldman that “the emotion categories posited by Tomkins and Ekman do not have an ontological status that can support induction and scientific generalization or allow for the accumulation of knowledge”.

What makes the Tomkins-Ekman paradigm of “six or seven or eight or nine structured, evolved categories of innate emotions” relevant here is that even though Spinozist-Deleuzean affect theorists such as Massumi should find it incompatible with their view, “Deleuze-inspired definitions of affect as a nonlinguistic, bodily ‘intensity’” are, in fact, in agreement with the former (Leys 2011: 442-443). This agreement is striking because even though Spinozist-Deleuzean affect theorist claim to be antidualist, they follow the Tomkins-Ekman paradigm in studying basic emotions. This means that there is a danger of falling back to the old Cartesian idea of the total separation between the mind and the body, as, using Leys’s (2011: 443) words, “action and behavior are held to be determined by affective dispositions that are independent of consciousness and the mind’s control”.

More crucially, however, affect theorists, particularly Massumi, have made use of some empirical studies in neurosciences to an extent that they have played a strategic role in developing modern concepts of affect. However, these studies have often been used in way not intended by the authors or the studies themselves were not up to proper scientific standards (for example a little-known 1980 German study of the emotional effects of the media by Hertha Sturm (see Leys 2011: 444-447), a series of tests carried out in the 1970s and the 1990s by Benjamin Libet (see Leys 2011: 452-458), and the 1998 study *Electric Current Stimulates Laughter* by Itzhak Fried et al (see Leys 2011: 459-463)).

In his *Autonomy of Affect*, Massumi (2002: 23-45) makes use of Sturm’s study without considering the possibility that the tests used for measuring children’s verbal-cognitive responses as well as the scales used in these tests were ambiguous, and concluded, contrary to Sturm, that the children in the experiment were physiologically split – there was



a gap between content and effect – because factuality made their heart beat faster and deepened their breathing, but it also made their skin resistance fall (Leys 2011: 447-448). In other words, this experiment was erroneously used as proof to Massumi's idea that "there is a disjunction or gap between the subject's affective processes and his or her cognition or knowledge of the objects that caused them" (Leys 2011: 450).

Massumi uses Libet's experiment to prove that our thoughts are generated by the body-brain processes and thus conscious thought or intention arrives too late for anything else but to supervise the results (Leys 2011: 454). This account is problematic in a couple of ways. Firstly, it seems to reconfirm the body-mind dualism in that it sees consciousness as purely disembodied and thus the body and the brain do all the feeling, thinking, and moving for us (Leys 2011: 455-457). Leys (2011: 455-457) shows that the setup of the experiment was flawed in that Libet had asked his subjects to pay conscious attention to movements that are normally subconscious. In addition, subconscious movements do not exclude intention; the whole situation may be intentional, as indeed was the case with Libet's experiment, without us being conscious of every movement. This is where Massumi, according to Leys (2011: 457-458) falls prey to a sharp false dichotomy between mind and matter in that everything that is not about meaning in a highly limited sense must be of the body.

The third study concerns the case of a sixteen-year-old epileptic girl who was undergoing stimulation by intracranial electrodes in order to locate the brain areas responsible for her seizures. When a certain part of her brain was stimulated, it produced involuntary laughter and mirth, which came before the varied reasons the girl gave to as to why she was laughing. Leys (2011: 460) explains that this study has been used as proof that a lot of thinking and interpretation happens during the half-second between the reception of sensory material and its conscious interpretation. The problem with that interpretation is that it reduces laughter from a complex social-cognitive phenomenon to a reflex, an automatic

response to stimuli without considering the meaning these stimuli might have for us (Leys 2011: 461-462). In other words, this materialist theory, based on the case of a girl whose laughter was caused by electrode stimulation, is used “to produce an account of the affects as inherently organic (indeed inherently mechanical) in nature” and exemplify “the way all the basic affects are supposed to work” (Leys 2011: 463).

Considering the above accounts on affect and the sharp criticism by Ruth Leys, I intend to use a ‘lite’ version the term ‘affect’ in this thesis. In other words, following Sara Ahmed, I will not make a sharp distinction between emotion and affect, although I will not equate them either. Following Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, it is more relevant for my work that affects have a political dimension and have to do with events, situations, encounters; there is an impact, an interruption or pause, and a reconfiguration or realignment (which may not be that different from what was before). Further, borrowing from Ahmed and Berlant, I view affects as sticky, contagious, and potentially socially determined. In the context of the present study, it is more relevant how various things, bodies, objects – be they human or otherwise, physical real-world objects or concepts, ideas, institutions, or discursive practices – perform affectively.

## Affective Themes Toolkit

The purpose of this section is to elucidate issues that arise in affective encounters from socio-cultural clashes either between people or people and various objects (physical or otherwise) or ideas and people. Another purpose of this section is to create a sort of a methodological toolkit, albeit necessarily incomplete, that I will use to carry out a socio-critical analysis of a literary text. Further, as it is beyond the scope of this thesis to expound on every possible affective theme, this toolkit is tailored for analysing *The Bell Jar*. However, not all the themes or their sub-themes elaborated on in the toolkit will be used to an equal extent in the analysis chapter. They are included here for the sake of a more complete picture of larger topics.

The method for finding affective themes or instances in texts is in itself affective or intuitive to an extent. It involves attentive reading whilst looking for sections, passages, hints that indicate a change in a character or situation, that create a pause, a reconfiguration, or a wish for one. Indeed, this need for affective reading may be why some affect scholars, Kathleen Stewart for example, have been striving for writing affect theory affectively. In view of the many ways of understanding affect, this task of finding affects in a text, however, is by no means easy. In the following, I will use the definition of affect I created for this thesis and, building on the work of Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Kathleen Stewart, and to a lesser extent, Brian Massumi, describe the major affective themes relevant to my thesis. I will divide these themes into loosely defined groups – Gender Roles, Social Roles, The We and the Others, and The Ordinary – that sometimes share considerable common ground.

## Gender Roles

By gender roles I mean socio-culturally determined activities, positions, and spaces deemed appropriate (or not) according to gender. Gender roles can also be viewed as “happiness scripts” that provide a set of instructions for what men and women must do and where they must be to be happy (Ahmed 2010: 59). Thus, depending on the place and time in history, some jobs and social spaces are considered more or less appropriate for men or women. These restrictions potentially perform affectively in various ways. On one hand, ‘appropriate’ roles are narrated as promises of happiness. Sara Ahmed (2010: 14, 90) explains that the promise of happiness is the promise that happiness follows if we do this or that; it directs us toward particular objects, makes them proximate, and thus it affects how the world gathers around us as we anticipate a good life. It is relevant to note here that what constitutes a ‘good life’ is determined by socio-cultural norms and value systems that we usually inherit from our families as we grow up, or as Ahmed (2010: 95) puts it, “to arrive into the world is to inherit the world you arrive into”. Interestingly, these beliefs and norms may perform affectively even if we no longer really believe in them or if they no longer make sense to us, for they tend to be deeply rooted in our psyche.

Another way how following gender-based norms might perform affectively lies in hope or optimism. It might be the hope for being accepted in society, for finding one’s place or role in life, for improving one’s situation, for surviving, or for maintaining the status quo. Like promises, hope and optimism are directed to the future; they are relational and anticipatory, they create a kind of a pause, instigating a change (or getting stuck) and are, therefore, affective. For Ahmed (2010: 181) hope is a feeling that is present, a pleasure in the mind, but it is directed toward an object not yet present. Thus, if we hope for happiness, we might feel happiness as long as we retain that hope (ibid). Paradoxically, this is a happiness that allows us to be happy with unhappiness (ibid).

However, this does not mean that everyone who has accepted an apparently gender-based role has necessarily done so for the above reasons or that the acceptance has been affective. Neither do I claim that gender roles affect the persons involved negatively. However, gendered situations frequently are affective and sometimes disastrously so. The disastrousness could often be said to be caused by cruel optimism or the promise of happiness or hope for a good (or better) life. Lauren Berlant explains that

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially. (Berlant 2011: 1)

Berlant (2011: 1-2, 13) further clarifies that all attachment is optimistic if optimism is the force that moves you into the world “to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene”. In other words, talking about an object of desire really means talking about a cluster of promises we hope someone or something to make to us and make possible for us (Berlant 2011: 23). Further, Ahmed (2010: 174) explains that, according to Alfred Schopenhauer, “no possible satisfaction in the world can suffice to still its [human desire’s] longings, set a goal to its infinite cravings, and fill the bottomless abyss of its heart”, and thus “the promise of happiness is what does not *keep its word*”. This means that as soon as one has the desired object, one is dissatisfied, disappointed (ibid.) and thus has to face the cruelty of optimism. However, as I explained before, optimism (hope) performs affectively and affect is sticky in that certain objects accumulate affective value. One tends to hold on to optimism and thus experience pain and disappointment time and again. The problem here is that rather than seeing the objects that promise us something as defunct, not capable of delivering on their promise, one tends to think that the problem is in not doing things the right way, in the person himself/herself, or even in other persons who get in the way.

The third way of how gender roles may perform affectively is through fear or threat. In terms of cruel optimism, there might be fear of losing one's social status, family, position, and so forth. Berlant (2011: 2, 23-24) argues that optimism may feel as anything or nothing, as it is ambitious in that it forces a return to the scene of attachment, even if it is unhealthy or harmful, because maybe this time the nearness of this thing will help you in fulfilling your dream. Giving up optimism causes the fear that one either loses the object of desire and, therefore a chance of a better life, or one is fearful of losing what one already has.

Analogously, the promise of happiness holds a threat that if you do not follow this or do that, bad things will happen. Ahmed (2010: 91) explains that the unhappiness of the deviant functions as a powerful perverse promise that is simultaneously a threat. Promissory scripts are affectively powerful even if we refuse to follow them. Further, someone not following the normative model may be perceived as a threat by others and their happiness, and thus one might be forced or coerced to follow it due to peer pressure a desire to keep one's family happy. After all, "going along with happiness scripts is how we get along" (Ahmed 2010: 59).

Gender roles and gendered permissions or prohibitions take multiple forms, many of which tend to go unnoticed. Some of the 'traditional' roles for women have, for example, been the role of the wife, whose job it is to make her husband happy, keep the family together, rear children, and take care of the household. Similarly, women (used to) have far fewer job opportunities available to them. Although these restrictions are no longer as strong in the western world, these ideas have not quite lost their affectivity and are, for example, visible in the pay gap as well as people's attitudes. In the context of literature, these issues are a sign of the times and should thus not be overlooked.

The attitudes that stem from 'traditional' gender roles can be more subtle in the sense of remaining unnoticed or unregistered. These might manifest in limiting the opposite sex to

stereotypes; in abusive language against someone conforming to stereotypical roles or not; in platitudes, attitudes, and behaviour governed by gender roles; and so forth.

However, there is another side to this kind of disparaging or hateful affective work. Hate sticks to the body and is internalised. This means that hated bodies start seeing themselves as hateful, which means an affect-driven self-colonisation takes place. Or as Ahmed (2001: 358) puts it: “The hated body becomes hated, not just for the one who hates, but for the one who is hated”.

Let us take the figure of the happy housewife as an example. Ahmed (2010: 50-51) explains that the “happy housewife is a fantasy figure that erases or conceals the signs of labor under the sign of happiness”. This means that the claim that women are happy doing gendered forms of labour is an expression of a collective wish, which works as justification of unequally distributed and poorly or unpaid paid work (Ahmed 2010: 50). The phantasmic idea behind this claim is that “any deviation from gender roles defined in terms of women being trained to make men happy is a deviation from the happiness of all”, for otherwise families would break apart and happiness would leave the house (Ahmed 2010: 55).

If a feminist finds this happy housewife fantasy not so fulfilling, she might be said to be killing joy (Ahmed 2010: 65). A feminist is thus considered someone who causes unhappiness, by spoiling the happiness of others, for she refuses to conform to happiness rules and might even lead others away from them (ibid.). Thus, a feminist killjoy, to use Ahmed’s term, is read as bringing others down because she points out violence in the others’ speech or activities (Ahmed 2010: 65). What remains unnoticed, however, is the very violence of what was said or done – the feminist is seen as the one who caused the argument and thus spoiled the happiness of others (ibid.).

The feminist’s reasonable arguments against sexism are dismissed as anger and she is seen as unreasonable, for her anger is read as unattributed, as if she is against something

because she is angry instead of being angry because of that something (Ahmed 2010: 68). This creates a sort of affective vicious circle because being unjustly misread causes anger and resentment, which in turn causes her to be read as angry. Even more so, people might even point out that there is a bright side of the situation. However, in this connection Audre Lorde (1997: 76) writes that “looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening or dangerous to the status quo”. Ahmed (2010: 83) expands on this thought by claiming that to look at the bright side is to obscure the world and thus to be blind or avoid what might threaten the world as it is.

There are ‘traditional’ gender roles for men as well. These work just as affectively, even if it seems counterintuitive, as we have lived in a heterosexual male-dominated society for so long. Just to give a few examples, men are not supposed to show ‘weak’ emotions publicly (they may show anger, but they may not show fear), they have to be the providers, breadwinners, have to have successful careers. If they fail to conform to these and similar rules, or even if they do follow them, the logic how this might perform affectively is very similar to that described above.

## **Social Roles**

In many ways, social roles are intertwined with gender roles, particularly as gender might limit the social roles available and sometimes social status might limit gender roles as well. Nevertheless, in an effort to maintain some structure, I will keep them in separate groups. Our understanding of social roles depends our literacy of normativity, that is, our understanding of how a normal society is supposed to function. Indeed, Berlant (2011: 52) explains that our “epistemological self-attachment is all bound up with literacy in normativity, and their relation constitutes the commonsense measure of trust in the world’s



ongoingness and our competence at being humans”. Berlant (ibid.) further elucidates that our sense of reciprocity with the world, our understanding what a person should do, and of who we are shape our visceral intuition about how to live. In other words, our sense of how to live and thus also what is right is affective. Adhering to social roles has an affective component and breaking social roles performs affectively on the one who breaks them as well as others in a similar way as with gender roles.

One of the ubiquitous social bonds is the family and reproducing family relations is connected to affect. Indeed, Ahmed (2010: 46) explains that “to inherit a family is to inherit the demand to reproduce its form”. This means that the family is judged as an object necessary for happiness or a good life that one is compelled to recreate in its traditional form (ibid.). In this way, the institution of family keeps on being perpetuated, even if we do not always experience it as happy or even good. In this regard, Ahmed (2010: 46) writes that “the point of the family is to keep the family the point”.

Thus, sharing a family means sharing the same happy objects, even if we do not experience them as pleasurable (Ahmed 2010: 47). For example, family rituals have the double function of keeping the family together in the proper way and giving the family members joy. However, the situation becomes problematic if the family rituals or the entire institution of a heteronormative family affects one, particularly a child of the family, in an unhappy way. After all, if parenting is about orienting the children the right way, the children ought to share the same happy objects, the same hopes with their parents (Ahmed 2010: 48). For example, a girl is expected to find a good man as a husband, or a boy is supposed to become economically successful and find a good wife. Even if the children do not find such prospects particularly promising, they may feel obliged, as Ahmed (2010: 58) explains, to take up the happiness causes of their parents. Their parents’ happiness depends on them making the right choices.

At the same time, parents want their children to be happy. Ahmed (2010: 19, 91) explains that speech acts such as “I just want you to be happy” show that happiness involves reciprocal forms of aspiration (I am happy for you, I want you to be happy, I am happy if you are happy) as well as forms of coercion in that one person’s happiness is made dependent on another’s happiness and willingness to made happy by the same things. One has a duty to be happy, if not for oneself then for others. Happiness is imperative.

The example of the family relations brings up the question of why people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies of enduring and happy couples, families, work relations, institutions, and so forth when there is a plethora of evidence of their instability and fragility. Berlant’s (2011: 2) answer to this question is that “fantasy is the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world ‘add up to something’”. Ahmed’s (2010: 75) argument is that “claims to happiness make certain forms of personhood valuable”, and social norms and ideals might become affective because they have been attributed happiness, as if their proximity creates happiness. For this reason, these very norms and ideals keep being circulated. But when those fantasies of happiness-bringing norms and ideals start to unravel, cruel optimism may follow.

Shame may also follow. Berlant (2011: 261) believes that the neoliberal present is a space of transition between different animating, sustaining fantasies that generates intensities that impose historical consciousness on its subjects as a moment without edges, and recent pasts and near futures blend into a stretched-out time, so that people struggle to find their footing. There is anxiety and shame that stop people from honestly talking about what has been sacrificed to protect the fantasies of the loved ones (Berlant 2011: 209). Still, “happiness is looked for where it is expected to be found, even when happiness is reported as missing” (Ahmed 2010: 7). However, the shortage of happiness has not put the social ideal into question but rather the hold of this life-organizing attachment seems to have

invigorated its hold on social and political life, which means that fault is not found in the ideals but in our failure to follow them properly (Ahmed 2010: 7, Berlant 2011: 227).

I have mainly focused here on family relationships, but social relationships also take many other forms such as friendship, working together, and hobby groups, as well as looser relations between various social groups or classes. However, as Berlant (2011: 226) argues, public spheres are always affect worlds to which people are bound by “affective projections of a constantly negotiated common interestedness”. Yet, intimate publics are more specific, for in them “one senses that matters of survival are at stake and that collective mediation through narration and audition might provide some routes out of the impasse and the struggle of the present”, or at least a recognition of being in it together (Berlant 2011: 226).

## **The We and the Others**

Sara Ahmed (2000: 22) explains that the stranger or the other is a figure born out of the discourse of stranger danger. The stranger embodies “that which must be expelled from the purified space of the community, the purified life of the good citizen, and the purified body of ‘the child’” (ibid.). The stranger comes to represent all that is unknowable, a threat to property and person, as somebody who does not belong and yet also someone one has to share the public space with (Ahmed 2000: 22). Thus, we are affected by the other because we feel threatened by them. We fear losing our happy objects or means to a good life, or we fear that the stranger might taint the social and physical space we imagine as ours and (potentially) happiness-causing.

Following Pierre Bourdieu, Ahmed (2010: 33) explains that manifested preferences or “taste is a very specific bodily orientation that is shaped by what is already decided to be good or a higher good”. Different tastes or lifestyles create strong, if not violent, aversion. It is not enough to desire happiness: one has to desire happiness arising from the right things:

good subjects will not derive delight from wrong objects (Ahmed 2010: 37). Thus, those deriving pleasure from wrong objects – the strangers – are not good subjects.

If we take pleasure in the wrong objects, we become out of line with an affective community and thus alienated (Ahmed 2010: 41). To feel alienated is to feel an intense burning presence, like a weight that presses you to the ground as well as keeps you apart as you cannot adjust to the world (Ahmed 2010:168-169). Thus, othering or demarcating someone as the stranger means that the same object has a different affective value to different people. Belonging or not to an affective community depends on the affect experienced by the proximity of that object. The gap between the object's affective value and how the object is experienced can involve a range of affects, hatred for example, according to the explanation we offer to fill this gap (Ahmed 2010: 41-42).

This is the basic principle of how affective communities or groups are formed. Berlant (2011: 31) and Ahmed (2010: 38) believe that the social bond is binding insofar as the proximity of the same object is experienced similarly; it may be a happy object promising a good life, something we are optimistic about, but it might as well be an object of hate. Importantly, the 'we' share the same social and/or physical space where 'they' are strangers, an undesirable element.

Thus, the others or affect aliens – people who convert good feeling into bad, who experience alien affects, who are out of line with the public mood (Ahmed 2010: 49, 157) – are seen as unhappy objects precisely because they are affected in the wrong way and thus affect others in the wrong way. Not fitting into the normative genre of the good life, they are perceived as a threat to the status quo or even possible future happiness. Threat is accompanied by fear. Brian Massumi (2010: 53-54) shows that the threat is from the future, exists through fear, and has an impending reality in the present. As threat is felt as real, it legitimates pre-emptive action, which is always justified by the affective fact of fear

(Massumi 2010: 53-54). The pre-emptive action taken against affect aliens can take various forms, from verbal and physical abuse to excommunication, and is often realised as hate crime. Interestingly, as Sara Ahmed (2001: 345-346) argues, hate is often presented as a narrative of love. That is to say, we love our community and as you threaten that community, action needs to be taken against you to pre-empt harm to us. Thus, a threat is never falsified, it is deferred (Massumi 2010: 54). It may also be argued that the hate group might be dreaming of “a return to a pristine past and the redemption of a human agency born in an act of vengeance against the actual state of things” (Stewart 2007: 88).

The formation of affective groups or communities is inevitable because, as Stewart (2007: 83) puts it, “differences of all kinds are noted automatically”. The reactions to differences vary: there may be irritation, amusement, or lack of interest and displays of kindness (Stewart 2007: 83).

One of the visible strangers, one that might cause great polarisation in society is the migrant, particularly one of another race or from another country. One of the reasons they are seen as the other is, as Ahmed (2010: 121-122) puts it, is a nostalgic vision of the world staying put, which involves nostalgia for a community of happy white people living together with other white people. It may be inferred from this imaginary idea of a happy white community that whiteness and happiness are imagined as social glue, to use Ahmed’s (2010: 121) words, that the community once had but has now lost. Thus, mourning the loss of such a happy world, migration and thus migrants are seen as unhappiness causes, as they are unlike us (Ahmed 2010: 121-122). The migrant is read as the unwelcome stranger.

A figure of the other I will take a closer look at is the queer. The affective problems of the queer resemble or are connected to those of gender and social roles. Thus, I will return to Ahmed’s (2010: 95) thought that to arrive into the world is to inherit that world and how the failure to do so is affective. “The queer child fails to inherit the family by reproducing

its line”, and she/he becomes an unhappiness-cause for the family (Ahmed 2010: 95). More so, the queer child might become an unhappiness-cause on several accounts. In addition to not reproducing the family line in a way that is already considered right and good, she/he might also be seen as spoiling the happiness of the family and thus making the entire family an unhappy object by proxy. It follows that the proximity of both the queer child and her/his family might be refused for fear of getting infected by unhappiness. Unhappiness is pushed to the margins along with the unhappy bodies (Ahmed 2010: 97-98).

However, one may also seek the proximity of someone in hopes of being infected by happiness (Ahmed 2010: 97). Thus, a queer child may refuse to associate with other queers as unhappy objects and attempt (or pretend) to form normative (heterosexual) relationships or at least be close to them. This is problematic on two accounts. The queer child might become an affect alien to a queer community that sees queerness as a happy object or at least embraces queerness. Thus, not finding the traditional happy objects delivering on their promise while also shunning queer happy objects, she/he is affected negatively on two fronts. If the queer child rejects queer relationships for her family or the heteronormative community, he/she becomes unhappy, and if she/he does not, the family is unhappy, which, in turn, affects her/his happiness.

If the heteronormative society does not recognize queer relationships, the queer couple becomes unrelated (Ahmed (2010: 109). For example, if one of the partners is in a hospital, the other becomes a nonrelative and thus has no rights as next to kin; she/he is left waiting alone in her/his grief (Ahmed 2010: 109).

However, the recognition of queers by a heteronormative society is also problematic. Ahmed (2010: 106) explains that “the recognition of queers can be narrated as the hope or promise of becoming acceptable, where in being acceptable you must become acceptable to a world that has already decided what is acceptable”. Further, “recognition becomes a gift

given from the straight world to queers”, which makes such recognition “a form of straight hospitality, which in turn positions happy queers as guests in other people’s homes, reliant on their continuing good will” (Ahmed 2010: 106). In such a world, the queers have to be grateful for what they receive, are obliged to be on their best behaviour, for refusing that obligation would threaten their right of coexistence. Thus, the image of the ‘happy queer’ becomes a kind of social hope, a sign of “how far we have come”, which means that disturbing thought of discrimination is not allowed to enter the picture (Ahmed 2010: 113).

As Heather Love (2007-2008: 52) humorously puts it, “there is a widening access to niche goods and services: lesbian cruises, gay cake toppers, queer prime time’ and “there are also weddings and commitment ceremonies to plan”. In this way, the culture of queers is appropriated by the straight society and made to follow the same rut. In Love’s (2007-2008: 54) succinct words: “In the era of gay normalisation, gays and lesbians not only have to be like everybody else (get married, raise kids, mow the grass, etc.), they have to look and feel good doing it.” This social hope and appropriation are risky precisely because they seemingly do away with discrimination by imagining that there is no discrimination (Ahmed 2010: 113); the violence of forcing the queers into the straight mould, and denying them opportunities to be happily queer, remains hidden under the dressing of beatific acceptance.

Therefore, the stranger, or the other, who fights for alternative futures is read as someone engaging in senseless violence, which means that “the violence they expose is not recognised as violence: structural violence is violence that is veiled” (Ahmed 2010: 170). Structural violence is only clearly seen after a revolutionary change has been lived through.

## **The Ordinary**

For Kathleen Stewart (2007: 1, 12) the ordinary “is a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life”; it is a “mode of attending to the possible and the threatening, it amasses the

resonance in things”. The ordinary is also a porous zone with its incoherence and contradictions that people make their ways through being at once half conscious, and confident about common sense (Berlant 2011: 53). In the ordinary, there is also “a politics to being/feeling connected (or not), to impacts that are shared (or not), to energies spent worrying or scheming (or not), to affective contagion, and to all the forms of attunement and attachment” (Stewart 2007: 16). In short, the ordinary is the (imagined) everyday life with all of its attachments, connections, resonances, disjunctions, efforts, and dreams and the affects that go with them. Ordinary affect, as explained before, “is a surging, a rubbing, a connection of some kind that has an impact” (Stewart 2007: 128).

Previously, I discussed the affective themes of gender and social roles and their narratives. In the context of the ordinary affects,

narrative and identity become tentative though forceful compositions of disparate and moving elements: the watching and waiting for an event to unfold, the details of scenes, the strange or predictable progression in which one thing leads to another, the still life that gives pause, the resonance that lingers, the lines along which signs rush and form relays, the layering of immanent experience, the dreams of rest or redemption or revenge. (Stewart 2007: 5-6)

Thus, ordinary life is filled with affects, for we constantly deal with and respond to impacts, negotiations, struggles, accidents, conflicts, dreams, hopes, fears, lusts, and falling in or out of love that push us to a direction or an impasse. Ordinary life, Stewart (2007: 19) further elaborates, draws its charge from rhythms of flow and arrest, as still lives – static states filled with vibratory motion, or resonance – punctuate its significance. When a still life crystalizes out of the daily life, it can shock us, give us sheer pleasure, be a wake-up call: it is affective (Stewart 2007: 19-21). However, these still lives and impacts of the ordinary life are not simply bad, or good; but they are intense, even if the intensity is barely registered.

The scenes of impact capture our senses, pull us toward themselves (Stewart 2007: 68). The scenes disrupting our everyday life – for example, a car crash, a news flash on anthrax sent by mail or on an armed robbery, an image of an Arab terrorist, a strike at a factory – become embedded in our minds and have an afterlife, as Stewart (2007: 68) puts



it. They have a pull, even though we may know the plot by heart. Stewart (2007: 70) writes that we complain about and deny the pull to participate, we blame the TV, ourselves, the suburbs, yet we desire to be there as well, for there is an energy, an intensity to them. This quasi-voluntary participation, according to Stewart (*ibid.*), usually takes the form of another kind of swarming: mobilization for justice, redemption, a neighbourhood watch.

Ordinary life involves the desire for a good life, and the good life comes to be understood as the normalised mode of life. Normativity should be understood here “as aspirational and as an evolving and incoherent cluster of hegemonic promises about the present and future experience of social belonging that can be entered into in a number of ways, in affective transactions that take place alongside the more instrumental ones” (Berlant 2011: 167). It follows that the idea of a good life and what is already happening in the ordinary world, “shaped in a crisis-defined and continuing now” (Berlant 2011: 54), are interconnected, for the fantasy of a good (or less bad) life is rooted in the historical present – phantasmal images of the better past or past promises projected into the present – and a future promise, the promise of capitalism to solve our problems.

However, according to Berlant (2011: 28), the conditions of ordinary life in the contemporary world are “conditions of the attrition or the wearing out of the subject”, which evoke “the ordinariness of suffering, the violence of normativity, and the ‘technologies of patience’ that enable a concept of the *later* to suspend questions about the cruelty of the *now*”, in the modern world. People, nevertheless, retain their optimism about a good or happy life that is just around the corner. Berlant (2011: 28) explains that this optimism is cruel, as it is based on people choosing to “ride the wave of the system of attachment that they are used to”, or “to be held in a relation of reciprocity, reconciliation, or resignation” that does not mean being defeated by life, or getting numb with the consensual promise while misrecognising that promise as achievement. After all, any object of optimism promises to

guarantee the survival of its goal as well as the desire that caused the attachment to it in the first place (Berlant 2011: 48). In this way, the same narratives of a good life, the same happy objects are passed from person to person, from generation to generation.

One of these great promises of happiness and good life is the American dream that is the life's guiding light, or perhaps an *ignis fatuus*, for many. After all, in the *United States Declaration of Independence*, the pursuit of happiness is proclaimed an unalienable right (Thomas Jefferson et al. 1776: par. 2). The declaration does not specify the nature of happiness; however, the objects of happiness that are to be sought after are not arbitrary either. They are specific in the sense of being in line with the dominant social idea of what is acceptable. This is evident from the same passage from the *Declaration of Independence*, as it can be read to mean that the government's and thus also the citizens' duty is to ensure a happy society by the means of the happiness of the greatest number. This, of course, is problematic along the lines I discussed in the section on the we and the others.

The word 'pursue' is also relevant here, as it implies that happiness is not *here* and now but *there*, something that comes later. As Ahmed (2010: 32-33) concludes, "happiness becomes a question of following rather than finding" and thus "achieves its affectivity by not being given or found". Also, as I discussed above, this temporal and spatial gap between the life in the present and what is promised if one follows the normalised route that promises to take you to desired object masks the cruelty, hardship, and misery of the now.

Nevertheless, even if one has not succeeded in fulfilling the American dream, it still retains its affective power and promise. Indeed, a portion of that power comes from precisely the fact that it is not achieved. However, it is also perpetuated by the stories we are being told. Stewart (2007: 94) shows how "the rocketing fortunes of the rich and the famous, the dream of a perfect getaway cottage, or the modest success stories of people getting their lives together again" keep the American dream in a sharp focus. These *bildungs*-stories must end

with the hero getting his reward. Everybody wants to be that hero, imagines and even believes that she/he can become that hero. This dream is made even more affective by conceiving that there are only winners and losers now (Stewart 2007: 93) and nobody wants to be a loser. Thus, we fluctuate between ups and downs as the dreams come crashing down, only to soar up again, revitalized (Stewart 2007: 94).

The American dream, Stewart (2007: 52) claims, can also take the form of a still life:

the little family stands beside the SUV in the driveway, looking up, stock portfolios in hand, everything insured, payments up to date, yards kept trim and tended, fat-free diet under their belts, community watch systems in place. Martha Stewart offers advice on the finishing touches. (Stewart 2007: 52)

Berlant (2011: 126) names this type of a scene a composed life lived with a sense of slight excitement, “fulfilling the promise of not living too intensely the good life of what Slavoj Žižek might call a decaffeinated sublime”. Then, the little glitches start coming up, adding a different charge to things (Stewart 2007: 52). There may be loneliness and disappointment or there might be a rumour of a murder in the suburb, committed by apparently docile neighbour, there might be a gas leak. In this way, the still life of the American dream starts to fray around the edges, its gills turning slightly green. The seemingly ordinary intimate space is revealed to be a scene of clandestine corruption, isolation, catastrophe, and crime (Stewart 2007: 52-53). What follows, as the bubble bursts, is frustration, anger, hopelessness, depression. The cruelty of optimism is revealed, even if for but a moment, or a day, or a year – until it mesmerizes us again.

Letting ourselves be trapped in the same fantasy and the same promise of happiness is what Berlant (2011: 126) calls stupid optimism: “the faith that adjustment to certain forms or practices of living and thinking—for example, the prospect of class mobility, the romantic narrative, normalcy, nationality, or a better sexual identity—will secure one’s happiness”. In other words, tweaking the forms and practices does not mean they are new forms and

practices and thus it is unreasonable to expect a different result. Still, we seem to be unable to let go of our (historical) normalized happy objects. Berlant explains why:

All of the affective paradoxes of the political in relation to mass demands for social change uttered from the impasse of the present extend from this, cruel optimism's double bind: even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working. (Berlant 2011: 263)

In other words, we tend to feel safer with what is already there, even if dysfunctional, than with plunging into unknown waters, even if the plunge could (potentially) do away with (some of) the miseries of the present impasse. Further, it is difficult to unlearn attachments to regimes of injustice (Berlant 2011: 184).

Considering the above discussion on affective themes, it seems that the history of being happy in socially acceptable ways is phantasmal, the present is an impasse, and the promised future happiness is an illusionary projection from the past that never was to the non-existent future, in the affective presence in the extended present. As the extended present involves memory and history that contribute to the sense of ongoingness of the world, of the normalcy of our being and identity, we tend to perpetuate and reinterpret the same ideas of what constitutes the good life. In other words, memory works affectively to help shape how the present is interpreted and thus how we act (Berlant. 2011: 52).

In the following chapter, I will apply this toolkit in analysing Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the method for finding affective themes in a text might itself be considered affective or intuitive. In other words, there are no hard and fast rules for determining which parts of the text indicate affective situations or experiences in the characters' lives. However, there are textual markers as well as content markers that may indicate affective works. These include, for example, words denoting strong emotions or emotional outbursts, passages referring to characters' changing their minds or directions or orientations, passages creating a pause or leading to a reconfiguration, unusual juxtapositions suggesting emotional turbulence or imbalance, and passages with

sudden unexpected or impulsive actions. Two other possible markers of affect are analepsis and prolepsis. Epp Annus (1997: 44-45) explains that flashbacks and flashforwards depend on the internal tension centres/sources of the story. In other word, stories have sort of gravitational centres to which things are pulled: what comes before the centre, moves forward, and what comes after, moves back. It is thus reasonable to assume, that these gravitational centres also mark and affective event (action, thought, encounter) because affect, after all, is about intensity. However, these markers are not a guarantee that we are dealing with affect, as their absence does not prove we are not.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF AFFECTS AND AFFECTIVE THEMES IN SYLVIA PLATH'S NOVEL *THE BELL JAR*

In this chapter, I will identify and analyse representations of affects and affect-related themes in Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*. For the analysis, I will draw on the affective toolkit developed in the previous chapter. However, I will not structure the analysis following the order of themes in the toolkit but will rather start from the beginning of the novel and follow the various affective paths and themes it will lead me to.

*The Bell Jar* is a first-person narrative that is told in the past tense. This is relevant on two accounts. Firstly, the novel is set up as the protagonist's, Esther Greenwood's, memoir written down at least some years after the described events took place, which means that the affective account is 'tainted' by memory. In other words, what we read about in the novel are not the immediate affects of the story world, but the protagonist's memories of them. However, this does not falsify the affects or make them somehow untrue, particularly considering how some affects remain with us for a long time after they have been triggered, or as Stewart (2007: 68) puts it, they have an afterlife. Secondly, the narrator is unreliable and thus the affects experienced by other people of the story world are filtered through the eyes and consciousness of the protagonist.

The novel starts with a fascinating juxtaposition: New York and the electrocution of the Rosenbergs (a historical event that took place on 19 June 1953). New York City is the symbol of fulfilling the American dream, from rags to riches, from obscurity to fame. Esther writes that she was *supposed* to be having the time of her life, be the envy of thousands of other college girls. She is a poor girl from the suburbs of Boston who won a scholarship to New York and is supposed to "end up steering New York like her own private car" (Plath 2013: 2). Yet, she feels and expresses alienation from that optimistic dream that penetrates

the nation. For her, New York is an unhappy place. This is evident from phrases like “the dark heart of New York” (Plath 2013: 107) as well as from passages identifying New York with attitudes or activities she finds distasteful. The electrocution of the Rosenbergs, conjured up with the image of New York in the first paragraph, is particularly evocative:

The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read about in the papers – goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty, peanut-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves. I thought it must be the worst thing in the world. (Plath 2013: 1)

This pairing of New York and an electrocution might be read as an expression of the negative affects Esther experienced in connection to the city. Esther could thus be read as an affect alien (Ahmed 2010: 49, 157): she does not share the idea of New York as the symbol of the American dream. This is further evidenced by the passage “I also had a dim idea that if I walked the streets of New York by myself all night something of the city's mystery and magnificence might rub off on to me at last. But I gave it up” (Plath 2013: 99). These negative affects include experiences of disappointment, frustration, and alienation, all of which affect her health and wellbeing adversely.

Starting the novel with the electrocution is interesting on another account as well. It is a foreshadowing of the electroconvulsive therapy Esther receives later on in the novel. In particular, her saying that getting electrocuted must be the worst thing in the world directly connects to her harrowing experience with electroconvulsive therapy. However, in terms of the story line – leaving aside for a moment the fact that Esther as the narrator of the book tells the story in retrospect – it would not make sense to affectively connect the electrocution with the therapy, for at this point in the story, Esther does not know that she will receive electroshock treatment. Thus, it may be assumed that this particular negative affective value was given to the electrocution of the Rosenbergs and electrocution in general by the first-person narrator later in her life. This instance shows how memory works affectively.

The electrocution gives rise to other affective responses in the novel as well. For example, making an effort for small talk with Hilda, Esther expresses regret about the Rosenbergs: “Isn't it awful about the Rosenbergs?” (Plath 2013: 96). When Hilda answered “Yes!” (ibid.), Esther thinks she has touched a string in Hilda’s heart. However, Hilda continues, “It's awful such people should be alive” and then “I'm so glad they're going to die” (ibid.). Esther is fascinated. She stares into Hilda’s mouth and thinks of her voice as of that of a dybbuk.

The word ‘dybbuk’ is curious, as it is a Jewish term denoting an evil restless spirit who possesses the body of a living person (usually a woman) for shelter and completing unfinished business (Jewish Virtual Library). Further, a dybbuk or *dibbuk* was thought to cleave itself to the living person’s soul, cause mental illness, and talk through the mouth of the possessed (ibid.). Considering that mental illness, hysteria, and even deviations from social norms commonly used to be attributed to (demonic) possession, ‘seeing’ Hilda as possessed by a dybbuk positions her as a deviant in relation to Esther’s personal normative world, which itself is not in sync with the general populace. The term also emphasises the affectivity of the situation by portraying Hilda as an anti-Semite. Moreover, the facts that *dybbuk* is a relatively rare word in English and that Esther saw a play with a girl possessed by a dybbuk the previous night further stress the exchange’s affective intensity.

This meeting of the two girls could be called an ordinary affect (Stewart 2007: 128), for it creates a pause, a shock in an everyday encounter between two bodies. It alienates Esther a little more from the normalised society, her peers, the prevalent mood. What is striking about this section of the novel is that it is preceded by a section that contains Hilda’s quote “I’m so glad they’re going to die!” (Plath 2013: 95-96) twice, once stressed with all capital letters, and once in italics. This prolepsis lends considerable weight to the full description of the scene and dialogue that follows, emphasizing its affective relevance.



Coming back to New York and the American dream, the city feeds into Esther's own American dream as well; it feels optimistic in the sense of apparently promising opportunities for a good life. What is problematic for Esther is that she does not know what she wants, or rather, she wants several mutually exclusive things at the same time. When she is asked what she wants to be, her boss, Jay Cee, says she wants to be everything. Indeed, when Esther reflects on the story of the fig tree she had read, she compares her own life with a green fig tree branching out before her.

From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. (Plath 2013: 73)

She further imagines herself sitting under the tree and starving to death because she is not able to choose which of the figs to pick, for choosing one means losing the rest. Thus, the figs drop to her feet, rotten.

The image of the fig tree is suggestive in itself. One way of seeing it is as a figuration of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for Adam and Eve use fig leaves to cover their nudity after eating the forbidden fruit. In the Christian tradition, God sends Eve pain, particularly in connection to bearing children, as punishment for eating the fruit. However, Esther as a figuration of Eve, does not pick a fruit. This might be read as her not taking responsibility for her life. All the fruits affect her, beckoning, promising, but she remains stuck in her personal impasse of indecision.

Refusing to choose one fruit may, in the light of Christianity, also be read as Esther's refusal to partake in the punishment bestowed on humanity for Adam's and Eve's sins. In other words, Ester desires an alternative to what is on offer in her contemporary society. The problem, however, is that she seems not to possess the fruit of the tree of life to give her immortality. Thus, having no real alternative to the fruits on offer, she occupies a sort of

liminal space, a limbo. The issue with limbo is that it is a period of uncertainty, of awaiting a decision or a resolution. It follows then that limbo means anxiety, expectation, even a hazy promise somewhere on the horizon, which, in turn, means that being in limbo is being in an affective state. It is a condition of impasse as well as a condition of cruel optimism. Here, the term ‘impasse’ is, following Berlant (2011: 8, 199), understood as “a space of time lived without a narrative genre”, the ordinary shaped by crisis in which people try to find modes of living on, a ‘*cul-de-sac*’. Berlant (2011: 199) further explains that in “a *cul-de-sac* one keeps moving, but one moves paradoxically, in the *same space*”.

Another way of interpreting the image of the fig tree as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as Kyle Greenwood (2018: par. 5) explains, is to think of knowing good and evil as having the ability to evaluate moral situations and thus being able to choose between good and evil. Following this line of thought means that Esther either does not know what is morally acceptable (which is unlikely) or she refuses the normative categories of good and evil, right and wrong. The result, however, is similar as discussed above: having no alternative tree (tree of life) to eat from, Esther remains stuck in her *cul-de-sac*.

The theme of New York City and the fig tree may also be analysed in the light of the American dream. After all, the U.S. is supposed to be the land of the free and the land of opportunities. Indeed, all the other girls who won the same scholarship have fixed goals, they know what they want. (What comes of their dreams and promises of happiness is left unsaid in the novel.) Esther, however, cannot fix her mind on one thing or fulfil her duty to be happy, to contribute to a happier society.

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that happiness is more about following than finding (see Ahmed 2010: 32-33). When the other girls in the novel follow happiness, Esther is indecisive in what to follow, she is at an impasse. At the same time, she is unable to let go of the normative American dream. This is what Berlant (2011: 126) calls stupid optimism,

for Esther keeps hoping that an adjustment to the normative path to a good life will eventually secure her happiness. After all, “it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working” (Berlant 2011: 263). In other words, Esther seems to feel safer in a dysfunctional dream and life than in rethinking her place in the world, in unlearning attachments to the old regime, which, admittedly, is not easy.

Another reason why Esther’s dreams of success are so many-branched lies in her socio-economic background. Esther grew up in relatively poor middle-class family in the suburbs of Boston. Thus, winning a scholarship to study in New York nourished her dream of becoming ‘someone’. The very notion of becoming in the sense of dreams or optimism is affective. This optimism as a cluster of promises is cruel in that it promises an improved way of being (Berlant 2011: 1) through projecting the imagined general past and fantasies into the future creating a sort of extended present full of anxiety and hardship, but also hopefulness. Even though hope has positive aspects, it is problematic as well, as it allows one to act with a sense of being able to control the future. Indeed, it is one of the evils in Pandora’s box. In essence, her dreams of success are a fantasy world that inhibits her flourishing in the now.

Moving from the suburbs of Boston to New York City also marks Esther’s desire for escapist mobility. One aspect of her desire to leave home, for which she does not harbour much attachment, is to escape her background that is relatively poor in economic and social capital. Further, she has a profound feeling of not fitting in, which she hopes but fails to change with going to New York. Moreover, Esther is unsure whether she would like to live in the city or the countryside and thus feels completely at home in neither. Having not acquired the morality of the local majority in either environment, she is perpetually displaced: she reads herself as an unwelcome stranger akin to how migrants are viewed by their host society.

What is most interesting about Esther and the American dream is that she recognises it as make-believe. When Jay Cee asks Esther what she was planning on doing after graduating, she has an epiphany, as she realises that even if you reach the object of your dreams, they are not what you thought it would be, but a sham. How affective this revelation was is evident in the figurative comparison she used to express it:

It sounded true, and I recognized it, the way you recognize some nondescript person that's been hanging around your door for ages and then suddenly comes up and introduces himself as your real father and looks exactly like you, so you know he really is your father, and the person you thought all your life was your father is a sham. (Plath 2013: 73)

However, as I explained in the previous chapter, optimistic attachments to normalised promises have an affective structure that involves an inclination to return to the scene of fantasy hoping that this time it will work out (Berlant 2011: 2). Such optimism is doubly cruel, as Berlant (*ibid.*) explains, because even if the scene of attachment actually impedes the attainment of what one is striving for or even constitutes a threat, it is also profoundly confirming. Therefore, it is hard for Esther to let go of these attachments, even if she understands that they are toxic.

Esther's happy objects, promising a good life, are also alien in the context of the novel. In the USA of the 1950s, the most common or 'proper' roles for women were either a housewife or low-paying jobs (secretaries, typists, teachers, etc.) with very limited career prospects. Women were supposed to be dependent on and subservient to men in private life as well as at work and public life in general. Esther's idea of a good life, however, meant something rather different. "The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters" (Plath 2013: 72). She repeats a similar idea later in the novel while thinking that there was not a single job requiring shorthand that she felt like doing. Esther wants to be a novelist, a poet, an editor – she wants to be her own master. While this is laudable from a feminist point of view, it also makes Esther an affect alien

because the normalised society affects her the wrong way and she affects others the wrong way by showing that the roles on offer are inadequate.

Esther is by no means the only woman who wants to be or is independent in *The Bell Jar*. For example, her patron, well-known novelist Philomena Guinea, Jay Cee, the magazine editor she was apprenticed to, and Doctor Nolan, her psychiatrist, are women who have found their independence and subjectivity. To some degree, they are all Esther's role models, which also means they are affective markers of what may lie ahead in her own life. However, these women have (probably) found their freedom through hard work, personal sacrifice, and luck and can, on the strength of their success and wealth, act in non-normalised ways, for their very prosperity (money, fame, career) valorises them as the American dream success stories. They are an exception, not the rule.

These women are, on one hand, a source of positive inspiration for Esther, on the other hand, however, they feed into her optimism that turns out to be cruel. When Esther does not achieve a similar level of success as a very young woman, she experiences frustration and becomes increasingly depressed, which, in turn, hampers her progress further by increasing the intensity of these feelings. It is an affective vicious circle. Interestingly, Esther also sees the imperfections of these women and thinks: "all the old ladies I ever knew wanted to teach me something, but I suddenly didn't think they had anything to teach me" (Plath 2013: 6). This seems to indicate that she neither wants to follow the normative rules nor be like the successful ladies she knows. She wants her own brand of success. However, this is problematic: not because Esther does not want to accept the roles offered by the male dominated society, but because her own imagined futures are unrealistically idealistic and, at the same time, still fall into the old normalised pattern, albeit decorated with a new varnish.

Having unobtainable or utopian goals is another reason why Esther's optimism for a future good life is doubly cruel. Firstly, as explained above, optimism for obtaining a happy

object in the future is cruel if one keeps returning to a scene of attachment even if it stops a person flourishing in the now. Secondly, following Massumi's (2010: 52-65) logic on how threat operates affectively, the illusion of a perfect life is projected to the present from an imagined future and is, therefore, never falsified, for there will never be proof that it is not a possible reality. In other words, the imagined future works affectively on the present and thus keeps one attached to it.

Esther, however, is not the only person in the novel whose optimism is cruel or whose American dream seems not to materialize all that smoothly. Esther's mother's dreams lie in her daughter living a certain kind of life; Buddy's parents' hope for Buddy's and Esther's happy marriage; Joan hopes to be cured of depression and become a psychiatrist – none of these hopes is fulfilled. Even Buddy who is generally depicted as an embodiment of high hopes and future success in his contemporary heteronormative America must suffer setbacks, if not defeat. Indeed, towards the end of the novel, Esther observes how Buddy's optimistic demeanour has changed. "Buddy met my eyes and I saw, for the first time, how he had changed. Instead of the old, sure smile that flashed on easily and frequently as a photographer's bulb, his face was grave, even tentative – the face of a man who often does not get what he wants" (Plath 2013: 229). It thus follows that even those who are seemingly perfectly set to achieve their dreams are often adversely affected by cruel optimism, for the reality always falls short of the ideal of the dream.

This far, I have discussed the issues of the good life fantasy and how gender plays a role in the career opportunities available to a person. As a natural continuation of these themes, I will now examine the gender roles and gendered expectations that have an impact on Esther Greenwood as well as her beau, Buddy Willard. The most obvious place to start is the institution of marriage, for it is a relevant theme throughout the novel as is, for

example, evidenced by the amount of space given to Esther's and Buddy's possible future prospects as well as by Esther's and Buddy's mothers' opinions on women's roles.

Becoming a wife is described as the proper goal for a young woman already in the first quarter of the book. The real reason for girls to go to the college is to find a suitable (future) husband and, perhaps, learn typing or shorthand to get work as a secretary and then marry a well-to-do man. Indeed, other girls stop making nasty loud remarks outside Esther's door "about people wasting their golden college days with their noses stuck in a book" (Plath 2013: 57) only after they find out that she was going to Yale Junior Prom with Buddy. This shows that when Esther was perceived as an affect alien (affecting others the wrong way), she was treated as an outsider until she presented an appearance of fitting the norm.

The case of Esther as an affect alien in terms of marriage, however, is far from straightforward. In the same passage in which Esther expresses distress about the nasty remarks, she also shows happiness about going to the prom with Buddy. The novel contains several passages where she talks about how she used to pine for Buddy, or where she imagines how it would be to be a prison guard's, a marine's, a car mechanic's, or someone else's wife. However, she also confesses on several occasions that she does not want to get married and that men and women are not equal partners in a marital relationship. In fact, she calls marriage a totalitarian state (Plath 2013: 81). The section in which Esther thinks what it would be like to be Constantin's wife illustrates this nicely:

It would mean getting up at seven and cooking him eggs and bacon and toast and coffee and dawdling about in my nightgown and curlers after he'd left for work to wash up the dirty plates and make the bed, and then when he came home after a lively, fascinating day he'd expect a big dinner, and I'd spend the evening washing up even more dirty plates till I fell into bed, utterly exhausted. (Plath 2013: 80)

It follows that marriage as an object affects Esther in two opposite ways: it is a happy object because it promises a tried-out stable life according to the rules and in the matrix of contemporary heteronormative society and because it promises that her marriage would make her mother and Buddy's parents happy; it is an unhappy object because it promises

loss of freedom through having and caring for children and through being under a man's control: "a man doesn't have a worry in the world, while I've got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line" (Plath 2013: 217).

It seems, however, that as the novel progresses, Esther becomes more and more disillusioned about marriage as a source of happiness. This is most evident in her relationship with Buddy. If at the beginning of the novel, Esther hopes to get married with Buddy, then towards the end, when Buddy finally proposes to her, she has an impulse to laugh and tells him that she is never going to get married and that her mind is quite made up about it. Interestingly, in response, Buddy tells Esther that she is crazy.

The words 'laugh' and 'crazy' are relevant here in terms of affect. Esther's impulse to laugh might be analysed as an affective response to the proposal on two accounts. Firstly, the contrast between how she is expected to react and her actual reaction is rather steep. Indeed, Esther's own words "I thought how that question would have bowled me over at any time in my five- or six-year period of adoring Buddy Willard from a distance" (Plath 2013: 88) contrasted with her impulse to laugh emphasise this gap. It is this contrast that creates a hiatus, a pause and then the impulse to laugh that marks the affect. This affect, however, is not only about marriage as such, for it is also connected to the improbability of the question, as she used to think that she is not good-looking enough for someone like Buddy and as he had cheated on her later on. Thus, there is a redoubling of affect (see Ahmed 2010: 24-28) here: her view on the institution of marriage and the unexpectedness of the proposal. This redoubling magnifies the affect here just like waves vibrating in the same phase get amplified because Esther's experience is similar in terms of being negative on both accounts. Moreover, this passage of the novel is an analepsis, as are most descriptions of Esther's and Buddy's interactions, which indicates that this situation performs affectively.



Buddy's reaction – "You're crazy" (Plath 2013: 89) – to Esther's answer is affect-driven as well. This is evidenced by his disbelief and maintained cheerfulness in surety that she would change her mind, even after she has said she will not. It seems that Esther's answer is as unexpected to Buddy as his proposals was to her. Buddy experiences at least three different affects in a short succession. Firstly, there is the anxiety and positive expectation before and at the time of making the proposal. Secondly, when seeing Esther's hesitation, there is disappointment because he thinks she has found someone else. Thirdly, there is hope, cheerful optimism because Esther's claim of never getting married sounds profoundly unthinkable. This exemplifies how socio-cultural norms can shape the affects one feels in a given situation or how 'the right affect' overpowers the initial response or affect by rapidly following the latter. In this case, something outside the socio-cultural norms just does not seem to register or is immediately reinterpreted in a way that fits the dominant narrative. This kind of reinterpretation may be done through categorising the other person as an other (crazy, for example), or finding an explanation that makes the out-of-the-ordinary response reasonable (a joke, for example). Buddy does both, in a way. As Esther is important to him, he naturally does not really wish to categorise her as an other. Thus, as a solution, he combines othering with humour, which allows him to brush Esther's difference aside.

It would, however, be naïve to think that the sole determiner of affects is the dominant socio-cultural narrative. It would be equally naïve to think that one can pinpoint everything that determines the type and intensity of an experienced affect. For example, in the case of Buddy's proposal to Esther, her childhood and dysfunctional family, her mental illness, and Buddy's infidelity and hypocrisy play a role alongside socio-cultural narratives in determining her affective response. Similarly, Buddy's affects are determined by his conditioning and experiences.

However, returning to Buddy's and Esther's relationship, there is an interesting affective situation when he visits her at the psychiatric hospital just before her probable release. After exchanging greetings, they simply stand there, looking at each other. "I waited for a touch of emotion, the faintest glow. Nothing. Nothing but a great, amiable boredom" (Plath 2013: 228). The affect here is indicated by an implicit pause, waiting for an emotion, or rather, a particular emotion. The failure of the expected emotion or reaction to manifest itself is affective, for it brings about a transformation or at least a realisation of a change in how she feels about Buddy, in his ability to affect her.

How Esther affects Buddy has also changed. Esther becomes aware of this when she notices a flicker of strangeness in his eyes: "Buddy looked at me then, and in his eyes I saw a flicker of strangeness – the same compound of curiosity and wariness I had seen in the eyes of the Christian Scientist and my old English teacher and the Unitarian minister who used to visit me" (Plath 2013: 230). This might be read as the point when Buddy marks Esther as an other, a social outcast, a crazy person. The negative way Esther affects Buddy is magnified by her helping him dig his car out of the snow, for he feels emasculated, particularly because he cannot refuse the help on account of suffering from tuberculosis. Thus, as a reaction to how he is affected, Buddy vindictively tells her "I wonder who you'll marry now, Esther" (Plath 2013: 230).

For this sentence to be hurtful, one has to see marriage as a happy object and a prospect of staying single as an unhappy one. Therefore, if Buddy's intent is to hurt Esther, as she assumes, he must believe in the social narrative keeping the institution of marriage as an ultimately happy object on a pedestal. It seems that this was particularly true for women in the 1950s USA, for most of the other women in the novel express this idea directly or indirectly. The text, however, does not make it clear whether Esther is really hurt by Buddy's remark even though she recognises it as having been said in revenge. Still, as this remark is

repeated verbatim twice within four lines, it is important, particularly considering that Esther echoes it again after three lines “and of course I didn't know who would marry me now that I'd been where I had been. I didn't know at all” (Plath 2013: 231). It may then be concluded that even if not particularly hurtful, Buddy's words affect Esther because marriage still carries affective happiness value for her, even if she is somewhat disillusioned with its happiness promise.

Esther is affected by apparently happy families on a deeper visceral level as well. She cannot relate to or find common grounds with them, which frustrates her and thus produces negative affects. For instance, when she is at a beach with her friends Jody and Mark and their son Cal, they start weighing on her nerves “like a dull wooden block on the strings of a piano” (Plath 2013: 150). She wants to tell Jody about her problems, her inability to read or write, or sleep, but holds herself in check, for she is sure they would not understand. She feels alienated. Similarly, seeing and hearing Dodo Conaway wheeling her youngest child in a baby carriage up and down the road frays on Esther's nerves: “One morning listening to Dodo Conway's baby carriage would drive me crazy” (Plath 2013: 114).

The effect Dodo and her children have on Esther is also heavily influenced on Esther's ambivalent feelings about having children. For example, in the scene describing Dodo wheeling her child up and down the road, Esther explicitly states “Children made me sick” (Plath 2013: 112), but elsewhere she imagines having a ‘traditional’ family. She also experiences mixed emotions and affects while looking at baby pictures in a hospital waiting to get fitted with an intrauterine device.

I smelt a mingling of Pablum and sour milk and salt-cod-stinky diapers and felt sorrowful and tender. HOW easy having babies seemed to the women around me! Why was I so unmaternal and apart? Why couldn't I dream of devoting myself to baby after fat puling baby like Dodo Conway? If I had to wait on a baby all day, I would go mad. (Plath 2013: 212-213)

Mostly, however, Esther sees a woman's role of having to take care of children while the husband remains free of such duties as an inequality, a punishment. Further, she sees children

as a way for men to control women, and that is something she deeply resents: “What I hate is the thought of being under a man's thumb” (Plath 2013: 217).

The importance of the theme of having children is also emphasised by the description of dead fetuses in jars and a woman giving birth at the hospital. Buddy is doing his medical practice in. These descriptions directly criticise the dominant position of men as well. Esther thinks that the drug given to women giving birth to forget the pain is just something a man would come up with to control women. As a reaction to this, Esther thinks that if she is ever to have a baby, she wants to stay conscious throughout the process (Plath 2013: 63). This way she would be holding on to her subjectivity. Interestingly, on the first pages of the novel, the Esther who writes down the story reveals that there is a baby in her life: “I cut the plastic starfish off the sunglasses case for the baby to play with” (Plath 2013: 3). The reader, however, is not told whether it is her baby or not.

Marriage and having children are connected to another important topic in the novel: purity. Esther herself claims: “When I was nineteen, pureness was the great issue” (Plath 2013: 77). She further explains:

Instead of the world being divided up into Catholics and Protestants or Republicans and Democrats or white men and black men or even men and women, I saw the world divided into people who had slept with somebody and people who hadn't, and this seemed the only really significant difference between one person and another. (Plath 2013: 77)

This sets the ground for purity, or the lack of it, potentially working affectively. The importance of the notion of purity is further cemented by the older generation, particularly by Esther's mother and grandmother who are persistently hinting “how fine and clean Buddy was and how he was the kind of a person a girl should stay fine and clean for” (Plath 2013: 64). Naturally, Esther expects equal purity from Buddy. When she asks Buddy on the spur of an instinct whether he has had an affair, she expects him to say that he has been saving himself for someone pure and virginal like Esther. Thus, when she finds out that he has been sleeping with a waitress over the summer, she is shocked. The affectivity of the situation is

reflected on Esther's outward utter calm when Buddy tells her the details of that affair and in Esther's words "After that something in me just froze up" (Plath 2013: 66).

I would go as far as to say that this disillusionment in people in general and men in particular is one of the main causes for Esther's loss of faith (even if only partially, as discussed above) in the institution of marriage as a happy object. As Buddy lost his purity and virginity, he also lost his status as a happy object, for in Esther's mind, he was now on the wrong side of the line distinguishing the pure and the impure. In other words, the affective value marriage and Buddy carry changes from positive to negative, which makes Esther an affect alien even if she was 'rightly' affected by the lack of pureness.

I say 'rightly' because, to risk a cliché, in a male-dominated society, the loss of purity is always the woman's fault. This is also bitterly acknowledged by Esther: "Of course, somebody had seduced Buddy, Buddy hadn't started it and it wasn't really his fault" (Plath 2013: 66). This double standard is something that she cannot tolerate and that brings about strong affective reactions in her. Esther "couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not" (Plath 2013: 77). Indeed, the same double standard is also evident in Esther's encounter with Eric who says that going to bed with a woman he found interesting would spoil it, as he would think of that woman as being just an animal like the rest and that "if he loved anybody he would never go to bed with her. He'd go to a whore if he had to and keep the woman he loved free of all that dirty business" (Plath 2013: 75). A similar point is made in an article by a woman lawyer that Esther reads.

This woman lawyer said the best men wanted to be pure for their wives, and even if they weren't pure, they wanted to be the ones to teach their wives about sex. Of course they would try to persuade a girl to have sex and say they would marry her later, but as soon as she gave in, they would lose all respect for her and start saying that if she did that with them she would do that with other men and they would end up by making her life miserable. (Plath 2013: 77)

Esther's mother agrees to this by pointing out that only marriage can properly bring together the different (emotional) worlds of a man and a woman and that a girl did not know about

this until it was too late and thus had to take advice from experts: women who were already married. Thus, girls have to follow a widely accepted set of rules that promises happiness, or at least avoidance of unhappiness. Purity is, therefore, perpetuated as a happy object regardless of whether it has or has not made the perpetrators any happier. This attachment is cruel optimism in that it projects one's wish for happiness that has remained unfulfilled on one's children (daughters in particular) while keeping the attachment to a traditional method/object that is believed to work on the strength of that very tradition.

Another instance that shows how the responsibility of purity, particularly sexual purity, lies with women (Coontz 2000: 40) is the scene in which Marco, who is described as a woman-hater in love with his cousin, assaults Esther and says that all women are sluts (Plath 2013: 105). This might be read to mean that women have failed in their duty to be pure and it is thus their own fault if they are raped. Marco is affected by women in such a way because of his frustration with not being able to marry his first cousin who he idolises as pure.

Esther's thinks Marco is going to rape her: "'It's happening,' I thought. 'It's happening. If I just lie here and do nothing it will happen.'" These words have a double meaning. On the one hand, she seems to hope to lose her virginity and thus the burden of purity. On the other hand, she seems terrified. Either way, the situation is affective. At first, she is arrested, she does nothing. Then the affect translates into action and she fights him off. Finally, she starts crying as the intensity of affect ebbs away and emotion takes over. Esther maintains her pureness.

Just as purity or pure women are seen as happy objects, unclean women are seen as dangerous, as others. In the beach scene with Mark, Jody, and Cal, the boy does not wish to swim and thus stays with Esther to talk. They argue about a play in which a youth finds out he has a brain disease, "on account of his father fooling around with unclean women" (Plath

2013: 148), and in the end he loses his mind, “and his mother is debating whether to kill him or not” (Plath 2013: 148). This is another example of how it is always the woman’s and not the man’s fault: the burden of purity lies with the woman.

Esther, even though obsessed with purity herself, doubts the validity and fairness of this idea. This is evident in her comment: “Now the one thing this article didn’t seem to me to consider was how a girl felt” (Plath 2013: 77). A bias towards more freedom for men is also apparent in the quote about the article: “the *best* [my emphasis] men wanted to be pure...” (Plath 2013: 77). The word ‘best’ is relevant here, as it makes purity optional for men, particularly if considering that it is paired with the verb wanted, which is not an imperative. On the other hand, this wording may be seen as manipulative, for every man wants to be the best. Whereas the manipulative reading would probably work affectively on some men, they were not the article’s target audience. It might also be, that the lawyer who wrote the article both acknowledged that men have more freedom as well as aimed to coax them to follow the rules, even if no reprimand followed if they did not.

In addition to the double standard, what really affects Esther is Buddy’s hypocrisy and her own insecurity. She describes how she could not stand “Buddy’s pretending I was so sexy and he was so pure, when all the time he’d been having an affair with that tarty waitress and must have felt like laughing in my face” (Plath 2013: 67). Here is another instance of two affective works getting intermingled and amplifying each other. Esther’s worry that people were laughing at her as well as other passages in the novel indicate her lack of self-confidence (feeling alien), which in turn, generates fear and anxiety. Considering that Buddy, whom she used to admire and trust, is in her mind now a manifestation of what she fears as well as an other on the purity scale, this and future encounters with Buddy are coloured by rather intense negative affects. Thus, a single affective encounter during which Buddy reveals his infidelity sets in motion a range of actions and affects.

Coming back to female and male equality, Buddy's idea of gender roles is typical of the time and is instilled into him by his mother. Esther comment how Buddy "was always saying how his mother said, 'What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security,' and, 'What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from,' until it made me tired" (Plath 2013: 67). In terms of affect, the most important word in this quote is 'tired,' for it refers not to usual tiredness resulting from physical or mental activity but to an affective reaction. Esther reasons that one of the reasons she does not want to get married is that even if she catches "sight of some flawless man off in the distance" (Plath 2013: 79), as soon as he moves closer, she immediately sees "he wouldn't do at all" (ibid.). She further states that the "last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket" (ibid.). Thus, Esther's idea of a good life, her (cruel) optimism, does not cohere with what is generally accepted in the society. This makes her an affect alien – out of line with the public mood (Ahmed 2010: 157).

Public pressure, however, breeds resentment, even anger, particularly if the rules do not apply equally to everyone or if some members of the public get to break the rules without remonstrance. Concrete instances of breaking the rules, especially if up close and personal, might also give rise to affect-driven reactionist feelings, thoughts, and behaviour. In Esther's case, this manifest in her decision to break the rules.

Finally I decided that if it was so difficult to find a red-blooded intelligent man who was still pure by the time he was twenty-one I might as well forget about staying pure myself and marry somebody who wasn't pure either. Then when he started to make my life miserable I could make his miserable as well. (Plath 2013: 77)

Even though she does not fully follow through on this within the timeframe described in the novel, she does lose her virginity to a stranger with near catastrophic results and she also apparently has a baby at some point. The problem with laying one's hopes in reactionist



activities is just another version of stupid optimism: “faith that adjustment to certain forms or practices of living and thinking /.../ will secure one’s happiness” (Berlant 2011: 126) because defining ones positive agenda as an opposite of something is merely a reflection of the first and thus ensures its survival.

In the western world, it is not uncommon to be antagonistic towards one’s parents and their values as a teenager. Even though I do not think that affect theory can explain it all – psychoanalysis and other disciplines have a lot to contribute to understanding such feelings and behaviour, but are well beyond the scope of this thesis – it helps to shed light on some of the causes of Esther antagonism towards her mother. Esther’s relationship with her mother and other family members and the family’s socio-economic background plays a pivotal role in determining why Esther is affected in certain ways in relation to the good life.

Esther’s relationship with her mother is complex. Her father dies when she is a child, but his death is hidden from her and her brother. They are not even allowed to go to the funeral or see the dead body and thus his death seems unreal to her. Indeed, she resents that her father has neglected her, and as she cannot express this resentment to him, she partially transfers it to her mother. It does not help that her mother says that her father’s death was a merciful thing, for otherwise he would have been crippled for life. Thus, the grief is buried and neither Esther nor her mother cries for their loss. Similar emotional reticence is evident when Esther is released from the mental hospital. Her mother says with a martyr’s smile that they would just pick up where they left off, “We’ll act as if all this was a bad dream” (Plath 2013: 227).

Esther, however, observes that her mother hates her life and her husband for dying and not leaving any money and thus making her have to work as a teacher of shorthand. At the same time, she wants Esther to follow in her footsteps, to learn shorthand as a practical skill for future life. Esther, however, cannot even imagine doing anything that involves using

shorthand. This is not because she is against having a practical skill but because her mother as an unhappy object affects her in such a way as to push her away from choices similar to those her mother has made. This follows the same logic Sara Ahmed (2010: 24, 34) explains in connection to happy objects: bodies are oriented or directed towards things that are considered good. In other words, as one is directed towards happy objects, one creates distance between oneself and an unhappy object. Moreover, things associated with an unhappy object acquire similar affective value as that object. This is evident from passages like

I stepped from the air-conditioned compartment onto the station platform, and the *motherly breath* of the suburbs enfolded me. It smelt of lawn sprinklers and station wagons and tennis rackets and dogs and babies. A summer calm laid its soothing hand over everything, *like death* [my emphasis]. (Plath 2013: 109)

and “I made a point of never living in the same house with my mother for more than a week” (Plath 2013: 114), or how her mother’s snoring, described as a piggish noise ravelling from her throat, irritates her to the extent that she imagines suffocating her.

Esther’s comparison of her mother to a beast is relevant here, as is the description of Dodo Conway’s family as cowy. Her irritation and anger stem from fear that if she succumbs to the society’s pressure and becomes a wife and a mother living in the suburbs that are a 1950s attempt to create a nostalgic white community as well as baby incubators, she will become as animalistic as the rest of the women living there. This connects to the city as a happy object – free, self-sufficient, and successful women live there – and the suburbs as an unhappy object, as it is the abode of women reduced to not much more than breeding animals spending their infinitely dull, routine-driven days taking care of their children and husbands. This further means that Esther’s rule of not living with her mother for more than a week also connects to escapist mobility. For example, Esther daydreams of escaping to Chicago where people would accept her for what she was and would know nothing of her present life.

Yet, even in her daydreams, she is affected by the normalised female role as both happy and unhappy. Her desire to escape from the suburbs represents her desire to be an independent woman, whereas her musings about getting married to a simple mechanic and having “a big cowy family, like Dodo Conway” (Plath 2013: 127) represents her entanglement with normative life. Her mother, a creature of the suburbs living out her life quite mechanically whilst following all the rules, is not of much help to Esther in sorting out her problems.

Her mother’s unwillingness or inability to see and help confirm to Esther that she is a failure. She has not actualised the full potential of the American dream or become happy and is thus incapable of instructing Esther how to flourish. Esther wishes for a mother who would embody her ideals, her idea of a successful life. “I wished I had a mother like Jay Cee. Then I’d know what to do” (Plath 2013: 36). This may be read as Esther projecting her own frustration on her mother as well, which in turn, enhances the negative affective charge her mother carries. Thus, Esther’s reaction to even the best parental wishes – in themselves affective, for as Ahmed (2010: 19, 91) argues, happiness involves reciprocal forms of aspiration and coercion – is negative. It is interesting that at times, her mother’s affective value leaks to or sticks on other older women as well. When it does, the reaction is a change of direction: “all the old ladies I ever knew wanted to teach me something, but I suddenly didn’t think they had anything to teach me” (Plath 2013: 6). Similarly, “Why did I attract these weird old women? /.../ [T]hey all wanted to adopt me in some way, and, for the price of their care and influence, have me resemble them” (Plath 2013: 211).

The word ‘weird’ in the last quote primarily refers a famous woman poet at Esther’s college who lives with another woman – “a stumpy old Classical scholar with a cropped Dutch cut” (Plath 2013: 2010). The words Esther uses to describe the scholar give a glimpse of how she is affected by queers. However, this quote must be supplemented with two

passages a few lines before it: “Whenever I thought about men and men, and women and women, I could never *really* imagine what they would be *actually* doing [my emphasis]” and in connection to hearing what two women were doing together at the hospital “I was disappointed. I had thought I would have some revelation of *specific evil* [my emphasis]” (Plath 2013: 210). These excerpts reveal that homosexuality as such puzzles Esther, she cannot understand what it is about or why. However, there is also judgement that seems to stem from her Christian upbringing and the social stigma connected to homosexuality, as the plot of *The Bell Jar* is situated before the Stonewall riots (1969) and the gay liberation movement that followed it. Indeed, the word ‘evil’ carries strong religious connotations and is something that must be driven out of the good Christian society. In this case, it seems, Esther is not particularly strongly affected, as she has lost faith in her contemporary society as a happy object, which is also indicated by the sentence “I was disappointed”.

However, things are quite different when a queer experience becomes personal. When Joan tells Esther she likes her, Esther replies ““That’s tough, Joan,’ /.../ ‘Because I don’t like you. You make me puke, if you want to know’” (Plath 2013: 210) and walks out of the room. This is a pretty harsh response, and as it is affect-driven, she does not stop and cannot stop to think how her words might hurt Joan because the reaction is too fast. Esther utterly fails to put herself in Joan’s shoes and imagine how it must be like for her in their contemporary society: being queer, Joan is an affect alien in the society in general, but also to Esther who herself is also an affect alien, albeit for different reasons.

Joan, like Esther, is unfortunately also suicidal. When Joan goes missing, her psychiatrist asks Esther if she might have an idea where Joan is. Even though the question is not accusatory, Esther experiences a strong affective response: “Suddenly I wanted to dissociate myself from Joan completely” (Plath 2013: 224) and coldly replies that she does not know. As Esther tries to go back to sleep, she sees Joan’s face floating before her eyes

and imagines hearing her voice rustling through the dark. When Doctor Quinn tells Esther the following morning that “Joan has been found” (Plath 2013: 225), her use of the passive slows Esther’s blood. She opens her mouth, but no words come out. This guilt-driven affective response partly drives its intensity from the fact that she had been mean to Joan and that Joan had helped her out when she was bleeding to death after losing her virginity. At this point, Esther seems to realise the violence inherent in alienating someone, in pushing them away for being different.

In this situation, Esther’s affects are also intensified by her mental health problems and hospitalization. That does not mean that psychiatric issues themselves are affects; rather, suffering from anxiety and depression in combination with the fear of not belonging as well as the fear of becoming a human animal in the heteronormative society intensify affects. Further, feeling helpless in the society’s power to lock one away as a crazy person when one crosses the tolerance border of difference further enhances Esther’s fear and anxiety.

It is Esther’s inability to cope with the world on its terms and the seeming impossibility of living in it on her own terms that affects her so strongly as to push her over the edge. Thus, Esther attempts suicide five times and explicitly thinks of killing herself on three other occasions. In these times, the negative affects she experiences are so strong that ending her life seems the only possible way out. Seeking psychiatric help, however, is problematic on two accounts. Firstly, it means submitting oneself to the normative powers that be, and secondly, problems of the mind are strongly stigmatised, as they do not fit into the ideal of the viral and perfect subject of the American dream.

Psychiatrists, interestingly, were expected to be a sort of quasi-mythical beings who could determine the problem and its root at a glance and recommend a cure, so that the patient would again become a model citizen in no time. At the same time, they were feared, for they possessed the power to lock people away for an indeterminate time. This is a perfect

setup for encounters with psychiatrists to be affective, which is evident in Esther's account on her first appointment with Doctor Gordon:

Doctor Gordon's features were so perfect he was almost pretty. I hated him the minute I walked in through the door. I had imagined a kind, ugly, intuitive man looking up and saying 'Ah!' in an encouraging way, as if he could see something I couldn't, and then I would find words to tell him how I was so scared, as if I were being stuffed farther and farther into a black, airless sack with no way out. (Plath 2013: 123)

Esther's immediate dislike of Doctor Gordon marks the encounter as affective. A few things seem to play a role in producing this affective state in her. Firstly, Doctor Gordon does not look or 'feel' as Esther imagined him, but is a 'normal' man who, therefore, could possibly be neither intuitive nor helpful. Secondly, there is the doctor's family photograph, facing towards Esther, on his desk that infuriates her. It is there as if to say that he is normal, successful whereas she is not. The photo emphasises the heteronormative family model that Esther fears to be part of and longs for at the same time. It reminds her of the cruel optimism of family life. Thirdly, Esther is scared. She does not know what will happen to her in terms of her mental state, and she does not know what the psychiatrist will do. The main cause of fear here is a perceived threat from the future (Massumi 2010: 53). As it is from the future, it is never over and never falsified, and it holds unlimited potential (Massumi 2010: 53). It is thus the non-existent or potential future that performs affectively and shapes the present.

The imminence or arrival of threat is read from certain signs or markers that predict a calamity. Threat markers may, for instance, come into being through a bad experience, or be adopted from someone else. Whether these signs actually are or are not precursors of particular events at a given time, however, is irrelevant in terms of their ability to produce affects. The problem with such signs is that they cause distress and may even be harmful, for they may either prevent a person from doing something necessary or make that person behave in a disruptive manner. For example, when Esther is at the hospital, she observes that patients who do not get a breakfast tray will be receiving electroconvulsive therapy. When the nurse does not bring Esther her breakfast tray one morning, she is shocked and scared,

for having had a very bad experience with electroconvulsive therapy before, she fears what is to come and hides from the nurses. Furthermore, she is even more struck by the perceived treachery of Doctor Nolan who had promised to warn her ahead of time if Esther was ever to have shock treatment. However, these negative affective reactions are premature, for Doctor Nolan does come to inform her and the treatment goes well.

In addition to anxiety and depression, Esther also seems to have an eating disorder. Like the first two, eating disorders themselves are not affects. However, they can cause affects and be caused by affects. Esther's addiction to fancy food and eating is connected to her socio-economic background, physical appearance norms, fat phobia, and sexuality.

Esther comes from a relatively poor family and thus she did not have many opportunities to indulge in good food. However, her grandfather used to take her to the country club where he worked as a head waiter and introduce her to special treats like caviar and anchovy paste. He would also bring her an avocado, her favourite fruit, every Sunday. Thus, instances like gorging on caviar and avocados with crab meat salad at a banquet marks her connection with her grandfather. It is as if eating these foods brings her closer to him.

At first, Esther's tendency to eat seems to be at odds with the 1950s trend of being slim. She comments that practically everyone she meets in New York is trying to reduce while she eats as much as she likes and never puts on any weight. This, however, indicates pride in her slenderness as well as a sense of superiority for not having to put any effort into it. When she later gains weight on insulin treatment at the hospital, her own appearance affects her: "I kept feeling the visitors measuring my fat and stringy hair against what I had been and what they wanted me to be" (Plath 2013: 195). Esther's fat phobia also extends to others. When Buddy gains weight at the TB sanatorium, Esther is shocked and repulsed. "The last thing I expected was for Buddy to be fat. /.../ But everything concave about Buddy had suddenly turned convex. /.../ Even his laugh sounded plump" (Plath 2013: 85-86). At

another instance Esther thinks how only a mother could love a fat man, and she cannot imagine what woman would lean over a big belly to kiss a man. These examples show how social norms of what a body should look like perform affectively in creating pride in or hatred of one's own and other bodies.

Esther's love of food is also sexual. As she tries maintain her purity and keep herself aloof from the normative heterosexual marriage, eating becomes a substitute for sexual pleasure. Esther's words "I'm not sure why it is, but I love food more than just about anything else" (Plath 2013: 22) show that she channels her desires into this one pleasure that is available to her. Thus, seeing and eating gourmet dishes affects her in a way that might be called orgasmic, as it evokes pleasures that are otherwise inaccessible.



## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to create an affective toolkit for studying literature and apply it on analysing Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*. A secondary aim was to give a brief overview of how various affect scholars theorise affect as well as to come to a definition of the term suitable for analysing literature.

The first part of the first chapter gives an overview of the history of the concept of affect, followed by a critical comparison of how affect scholars relevant for this thesis have theorised affect. The term was defined for the purpose of this thesis as the power to affect and be affected and qualified by certain characteristics: affect is neither completely distinct from nor equal to emotion; affect has a political dimension and has to do with events, situations, encounters; affect involves an impact, an interruption or pause, and a reconfiguration or realignment; affect is sticky, contagious, and potentially socially determined.

In the second part of the first chapter, a toolkit of affective themes for studying literature in general and *The Bell Jar* in particular is developed. The affective themes toolkit is developed by synthesising the ideas of prominent affect scholars such as Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, Kathleen Stuart, and Brian Massumi. For the sake of clarity, the toolkit is divided into loosely defined themes: Gender Roles, Social Roles, The We and the Others, and The Ordinary, and under each theme, several relevant affective (sets of) problems are described and analysed.

In the second chapter of the thesis, the toolkit is applied for studying *The Bell Jar* in order to find and analyse affect-related issues present there. The analysis is based on the premise that literature is important as a representation of potential social realities whose analysis can help us better understand and solve real-world problems. Further, in addition to

what is explicitly expressed in the text, the analysis also takes into consideration the socio-cultural circumstances of the 1950s USA as background information. The analysis reveals that fiction set in the 1950s and published in the 1960s (*The Bell Jar* was first published in 1963) can be rich in affective themes even though the 1950s were outwardly a homogenous era in terms of shared dreams and values, a society of satisfied and happy people.

In *The Bell Jar*, New York City is depicted as a symbol of the American dream as well as an unhappy place. Further, Esther is adversely affected by the normative American dream but at the same time has her own version of the same dream, which means she still believes in it as she thinks that tweaking the dream will make it work. This is stupid optimism (Berlant 2011: 126). However, this also shows that one object can affect a person in opposite ways at the same time. Moreover, making plans and fantasising how one thing or another will work out and contribute to personal happiness or at least decreasing of unhappiness performs affectively, as it creates an intensity, a sort of frenzy. This is visible in the passage in which Esther thinks of all the things she will do: “Then plan after plan started leaping through my head, like a family of scatty rabbits” (Plath 2013: 118).

Esther’s feverish plan-making is also telling about her relatively poor socio-economic background and the desire to escape it. However, she not only wants to escape the suburbs or her economic paucity but also a certain mode of life as well as gender roles imposed on women. Indeed, for Esther, the suburbs represent a life in which the woman leads an animal-like existence taking care of the children and husband under the dictates of the latter. It is a life in which the woman’s personal ambitions and individuality are deadened until she is no more than a zombie. Esther’s fear of such a future and her desire and plans to escape show how strongly an idea of this life affects her.

As affect is sticky or contagious, bodies connected to the suburbs and thus the normalised life gain the same affective value. This is evident in Esther’s relationship with

her mother, in how she sees Dodo Conaway, and how she feels about staying in her childhood home.

Moreover, Esther is affected by the apparent impossibility of escaping the box the society wants to put her in. “The only trouble was, Church, even the Catholic Church, didn’t take up the whole of your life. No matter how much you knelt and prayed, you still had to eat three meals a day and have a job and live in the world” (Plath 2013: 158). Thus, moving to a different space or place may seem hopeful at first, but still disappoints in the end. Further, fleeing to a different society or culture displaces one into the position of an other, a migrant of sorts.

However, rebelling against the norms of the society mark Esther as an affect alien. Her decision not to get married, for example, is met with disbelief and suspicion. Disbelief, in turn, may turn into hostility, for an other is perceived as dangerous. Thus, there is a point when a person not conforming to the approved way of life might be diagnosed as insane and institutionalised either in an attempt to cure her (electroconvulsive therapy, for example), or to be locked away for good. The fear of unregulated difference is affective, as it poses an imagined future danger.

The 1950s obsession with purity affects Esther because it is yet another ideal that puts men and women into an unequal position. The burden of sexual containment lies with the woman (Coontz 2000: 40), which means that women are supposed to stay a virgin until marriage while men have no such duty. This is confirmed by Esther’s sarcastic remark “Of course, somebody had seduced Buddy, Buddy hadn’t started it and it wasn’t really his fault” (Plath 2013: 66). Esther sees similar inequality in having to take care of children while the man is free to do what he wants. Moreover, the man not only has the freedom to make his own decisions, but in a marital relationship, also wields power over the woman.

Thus, the analysis of *The Bell Jar* demonstrates that its protagonist, outwardly perfectly set to become a successful member of the society, is an affect alien in several respects. This shows that hegemonic normative societies that prescribe right ways to live, right ways to be happy, and the imperativeness of happiness are inherently problematic. The analysis also confirms, in line with arguments put forth by Ahmed (2010), Stewart (2007), and Berlant (2011), that interactions with people and certain objects are often affective and these affects determine further actions or inactions and play a role in one's quality of life.

Even though affect has been much studied over recent decades, it has not been widely used for analysing literature. Indeed, text examples have often been used to illustrate the theory, but theory has been more seldom applied to analyse entire texts. The value of this thesis, therefore, lies in positing a definition of affect suitable for analysing literature, developing a toolkit of affective themes for studying literature, and in analysing an entire work of fiction through the prism of affect theory.

However, this thesis is all-encompassing neither in terms of possible affective themes that might be studied in fiction nor in terms of affective themes and problems present in *The Bell Jar*. This results from two factors: the length of the thesis is limited, and the number of possible affective themes and their nuances is too great and varied to be incorporated into one study. Thus, a selection of themes that seemed most pertinent was made.

In applying the toolkit to the text, two important shortcomings that require further research became evident. Firstly, the toolkit itself would benefit from in depth methods for finding affective markers in a text based on, for example text poetics, emphasis markers, pragmatics, narrative time markers, and intensity markers. In this thesis, the most interesting find in this context was how prolepses and analepses function as gravitational points in the text (Annas: 1997: 44-45) and thus mark intensity.

Secondly, if a toolkit is customised for a particular work of fiction, it would benefit from taking into account the period it is set in as well as the time and place it was written, for this would enable better understanding and analysis of the text. In other words, the affective toolkit could be combined with methods that are attentive to socio-historical circumstances.

Further, it would be productive to study Berlant's (2011: 10) concept of crisis ordinariness, or systemic crisis in the contemporary society, as it describes how catastrophic and traumatic events that have become a habitual part ordinary life perform affectively. Comparing how crisis ordinariness is represented in fiction from various decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century might deepen our understanding how and why crises have spread and how they impact people's ordinary lives.

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

Plath, Sylvia. 2013. *The Bell Jar*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.

### Secondary Sources

Ahmed, Sara. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge.

Ahmed, Sara. 2001. The Organisation of Hate. *Law and Critique*. 12: 345-365.

Ahmed, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Annus, Epp. 1997. Eesti romaani narratiivseid mudeleid A.H. Tammsaare 'Tõe ja üiguse' ning B. Kangro Tartu romaanide näitel. In Jaan Undusk (ed) *Klassika ja narratiivsus: Tammsaarest Kangroni*, 9-58. Tallinn: Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus.

Auerbach, Erich. 2013. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press

Banita, Georgina. 2007. "The Same, Identical Woman": Sylvia Plath in the Media. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*. 40: 2, 38-60.

Behrens, Susan J. 2013. A Note on *The Bell Jar* (1963). *Names*. 61: 4, 239-243.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Bourassa, Alan. 2002. Literature, Language, and the Non-human. In Brian Massumi (ed). *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, 60-76. London: Routledge.

- Brinkema, Eugenie. 2014. *The Forms of the Affects*. Durham and London: Duke University Press
- Budick, E. Miller. 1987. The Feminist Discourse of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. *College English*. 49: 8, 872-885.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineto. 2007. Introduction. In Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (ed). 2007. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 2000. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.
- Dale, Catherine. 2002. Cruel: Antonin Artaud and Gilles Deleuze. In Brian Massumi (ed). *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, 85-100. London: Routledge.
- Fineman, Joel. 1980. The Significance of Literature: 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. *October*. 15: 79-90.
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. 2010. An Inventory of Shimmers. In Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth (ed). *The Affect Theory Reader*, 52-70. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hall, Robert A., Jr. 1961. Literature, Life and Language. *The Modern Language Journal*. 45: 3, 121-126.
- Ives, Sarah. 2013. Confession, Subjectivity and McCarthyist Paranoia in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*: A Foucauldian Perspective. *Postgraduate English*. 27, 1-23.
- Jefferson, Thomas, et al. 1776. *The United States Declaration of Independence*. Available at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>, accessed 18 November 2018.

*Jewish Virtual Library*. Available at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/dibbuk-dybbuk>,  
accessed 14 April 2019.

Keen, Suzanne. 2006. A Theory of Narrative Empathy. *Narrative*. 14: 3, 209-236

Keen, Suzanne. 2007. *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Korthals Altes, Liesbeth. 2014. *Ethos and Narrative Interpretation: The Negotiation of Values in Fiction*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

Laclau, Ernesto. 1996. *Emancipation(s)*. London, New York: Verso.

Leys, Ruth. 2011. The Turn to Affect: A Critique. *Critical Inquiry*. 37: 3, 434-472.

Lichtenberg Ettinger, Bracha. 2002. Trans-subjective transferential borderspace. In Brian Massumi (ed). *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, 215-239. London: Routledge.

Lorde, Audre. 1997. *The Cancer Journals*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Lotman, Juri. 2011. The Place of Art Among Other Modelling Systems. *Sign Systems Studies*. 39: 2/4, 249-270.

Love, Heather. 2007-2008. Compulsory Happiness and Queer Existence. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*. 63: 53-64.

Lugo, Andru. 2010. The Female Predicament in The Bell Jar and St. Mawr. *Plath Profiles*. 10, 144-165.

Massumi, Brian. 1995. The Autonomy of Affect. *Cultural Critique*. 31: 83–109.

Massumi, Brian. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Massumi, Brian. 2005. Fear (The Spectrum Said). *Positions: East Asia cultures critique*. 13: 1, 31-48.



- Massumi, Brian. 2010. The Future Birth of the Affective Fact. The Political Ontology of Threat. In Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth (ed). *The Affect Theory Reader*, 52-70. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Massumi, Brian. 2011. *Semblance and Event: Activist philosophy and the occurrent arts*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press.
- Massumi, Brian. 2015. *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Milkman, Ruth. 2016. *On Gender, Labor, and Inequality*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Murphie, Andrew. 2002. Putting the virtual back into VR. In Brian Massumi (ed). *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, 188-214. London: Routledge.
- O'Leary, Timothy. 2005. Foucault, Dewey, and the Experience of Literature. *New Literary History*. 36: 4, 543-557.
- Ott, Brian L. 2017. Affect. In Jon Nussbaum (ed). *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Available at <http://communication.oxfordre.com>, accessed 8 November 2017.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Available at <http://www.oed.com>, accessed 13 January 2019.
- Ortony, Andrew and Terence J. Turner. 1990. What's basic about basic emotions? *Psychological Review*. 97: 315-331.
- Poynton, Cate and Alison Lee. 2011. Affecting Discourse: Towards an embodied discourse analytics. *Social Semiotics*. 21: 5, 633-644.
- Seigworth, Gregory J. 2005. From Affection to Soul. In C. J. Stivale (ed). *Gilles Deleuze: Key concepts*, 159–169. Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Tomkins, Silvan S. 1995. The quest for primary motives: Biography and autobiography of an idea. In E. Virginia Demos (ed.) *Exploring affect: the selected writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*, 27-63. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomkins, Silvan S. 2009. Affect Theory. In Klaus R. Scherer, Paul Ekman (ed). *Approaches to Emotion*. 163-196. New York: Psychology Press.
- Wagner-Martin, Linda. 2003. *Sylvia Plath: A literary life*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Sven Blehner**

**Using Affect Theory for Studying Literature: Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*  
Afektiteooria kasutamine kirjanduse uurimisel: Sylvia Plathi „Klaaskuppel“**

Magistritöö

**2019**

Lehekülgede arv: 83

Annotatsioon:

Magistritöö eesmärgiks on luua tööristakast afektiivsete teemade ja probleemide uurimiseks ja kasutada seda Sylvia Plathi romaani „Klaaskuppel“ analüüsimiseks. Sellise analüüsi eesmärgiks on näidata, et afektiteooria võib olla kasulik meetod ilukirjanduse uurimisel, sest see aitab potentsiaalselt paremini mõista, kuidas afekt ja afektiivsed probleemid toimivad. Töö sekundaarseks eesmärgiks on humanitaarias kasutatava afekti mõiste analüütilise ülevaate andmine ja kirjanduse uurimiseks sobiva afekti definitsiooni loomine.

Sissejuhatuses arutletakse, miks kirjandust afektiteooria abil uurida ning antakse ülevaade naiste olukorrast 1950ndate USAs. Samuti esitatakse sissejuhatuses töö eesmärgid ja selle olulisus kirjanduse uurimise kontekstis.

Teoreetiline peatükk koosneb kahest osast. Neist esimeses antakse analüütiline ülevaade sellest, kuidas erinevad teoreetikud afekti mõistet on kasutanud ja esitatakse afekti definitsioon, mis sobib kirjanduse uurimiseks. Teine osa põhineb Lauren Berlanti, Sara Ahmedil ja Kathleen Stewarti töödel, mille sünteesimisel luuakse afektiivsete teemade ja probleemide tööristakast kirjanduse sotsiaal-kriitiliseks analüüsiks. Tööriistakast on jagatud neljaks laiaks temaatikaks: soorollid, sotsiaalsed rollid, meie ja teised ning tvapärase.

Empiirilises peatükis kasutatakse teoreetilises peatükis välja arendatud afektiivset tööriistakasti Sylvia Plathi romaani „Klaaskuppel“ analüüsimiseks. Afektiivsete teemade ja probleemide tuvastamiseks romaanis kasutati tähelepanelikku lugemist pöörates erilist tähelepanu tekstilistele ja kontekstuaalsetele markeritele, mis potentsiaalselt viitavad afektile. Samuti arvestati afektiivsete teemade analüüsil 1950ndate USA sotsiaalkultuurilist olustikku.

Analüüsi käigus selgus, et ka romaanis, mis on avaldatud 1963. aastal ja mille tegevus toimub 1950ndatel on rikkalikult afektiivseid teemasid, kuigi 1950ndate USA oli näiliselt üsna homogeenne ühiskond, milles kõigil oli sama unistus. Samuti näitas romaani analüüs, et kuigi selle peategelane on näiliselt positsioneeritud nii, et temast saaks edukas ja õnnelik normatiivse ühiskonna liige, on ta tegelikult afektiivne võõras. See omakorda näitab, et hegemoonilased normatiivsed ühiskonnad, mis teevad ettekirjutusi kuidas peab elama ja olema õnnelik on olemuslikult probleemsed. Lisaks kinnitas analüüs Ahmedil (2010), Stewartil (2007) ja Berlanti (2011) mõtteid, et suhtlemine ja suhestumine inimeste ja teatud objektidega on sageli afektiivne ning need afektid võivad mõjutada edasisi tegevusi või tegevusetust ja samuti mõjutada elu kvaliteeti.

Märksõnad:

Afekt, afektiteooria, sotsiaalkriitiline analüüs, ameerika kirjandus, Sylvia Plath.

## **Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks**

Mina, Sven Blehner,

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) minu loodud teose  
Using Affect Theory for Studying Literature: Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar,  
mille juhendaja on Prof. Raili Marling,  
reprodutseerimiseks eesmärgiga seda säilitada, sealhulgas lisada digitaalarhiivi DSpace kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni.
2. Annan Tartu Ülikoolile loa teha punktis 1 nimetatud teos üldsusele kättesaadavaks Tartu Ülikooli veebikeskkonna, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace kaudu Creative Commons'i litsentsiga CC BY NC ND 3.0, mis lubab autorile viidates teost reprodutseerida, levitada ja üldsusele suunata ning keelab luua tuletatud teost ja kasutada teost ärieesmärgil, kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni.
3. Olen teadlik, et punktides 1 ja 2 nimetatud õigused jäävad alles ka autorile.
4. Kinnitan, et lihtlitsentsi andmisega ei riku ma teiste isikute intellektuaalomandi ega isikuandmete kaitse õigusaktidest tulenevaid õigusi.

Sven Blehner

20.05.2019

**Autorsuse kinnitus**

Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva magistritöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride kolledži anglistika osakonna magistritöö nõuetest ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

Sven Blehner

20.05.2019

**Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.**

Raili Marling

20.05.2019